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Her Surprising Curious Adventures In Strange Parts & Happy
Deliverance From Pirates, Battle, Captivity, & Other
Terrors; Together With Divers Romantic & Moving Accidents
As Set Forth By Benet Pengilly (Her Companion In Misfortune
& Joy), & Now First Done Into Print

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HER SURPRISING CURIOUS ADVENTURES IN
STRANGE PARTS & HAPPY DELIVERANCE
FROM *PIRATES, BATTLE, CAPTIVITY*, & OTHER
TERRORS; TOGETHER WITH DIVERS *ROMAN-
TIC & MOVING ACCIDENTS* AS SET FORTH
BY BENET PENGILLY (HER COMPANION
IN MISFORTUNE & JOY), & NOW FIRST DONE
INTO PRINT

BY
FRANK BARRETT.

NEW YORK:
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THE ADMIRABLE LADY BIDDY FANE.

CHAPTER I.

I AM TAKEN OUT OF THE PILLORY AND NARROWLY ESCAPE GOING TO THE WHIPPING-POST.

As 'tis the present mode to embellish a history with a portrait of the writer, it will not be amiss if I here at the outset give you some hints by which you may see, as in a frontispiece, the image of that Benet Pengilly who is about to tell you many marvelous things.

What kind of man I am you may better judge when you come to the last page of this history; my business now is to present my image as I was; to which end I would have you picture a man close upon thirty years of age, clad in a jerkin and breeches of leather, six foot and some odd inches in height, gaunt and lean as a famished wolf, fierce visaged, with an unkempt beard of hair, and a shock ragged as a bush, and both as black as any ink; a deep-sunk, bloodshot eye, and a swarthy skin, all besmirched with broken egg, filth and blood. This pretty portraiture you shall frame in the town pillory, which stood over against the church of St. Mary, in the city of Truro, with this very true description writ under the headpiece:

"BENET PENGILLY, A STURDY ROGUE."

And now to begin my story, I must tell you that I had stood in this pillory from sunrise, a sport for all the cowards in the town. I say cowards, for surely those who have courage are never cruel to the helpless, and these—the strongest of whom would have fled before me had I been free—had baited me as curs bait a tethered bull, without any kind of mercy, jeering at me, and making me a mark for any beastliness that came to hand, ay, and sharp stones to boot, as the blood from my lips and cheek testified.

There were never less than a couple of score of this rabble about me, hallooing and whooping; for as fast as one left me to go about his business, another took his place. But amongst the constantly changing crowd was one who, seated upon the stone bench where the town porters are wont to rest their loads awhile, never took his eyes off me, nor budged from his place from the time he came hither, which was about ten o'clock, till now, when the sun was past the meridian. He watched me as a surgeon marks the bearing of his subject under the knife; nay, rather 'twas as a fiend might watch the torment of the damned, for a hellish smile crept over his face as some insult more cruel than the rest provoked me to a state of desperation.

This man I had seen before. His name was Rodrigues. 'Twas he who, in the month of March, came into Plymouth, his ship all decked out with ribbons, his crew arrayed in lace and cambric, and every mother's son as drunk as a beggar; 'twas he who had set tubs of sherries on the Hoe, staved in the heads, and in sheer wantonness and drunken folly cast the wine right and left with his joined palms; to say nothing of divers other senseless tricks whereby in something less than two months he had squandered treasure to the value of nigh upon £7000 and left not enough, when his ship was seized, to pay the King's dues. He still wore the remnants and wreck of his former finery—silk stockings, satin trunks, velvet doublet, and a hat with a feather in it; but, lord! so broken, stained, and bedrabbled through his mad frolics that plain homespun had looked rich beside it.

I have heard that this Rodrigues was of gipsy origin, and indeed he looked fierce and brutal enough for that or anything else. He had a short, curling beard. His hair grew low down on his brows, and fell behind his ears in long, wiry ringlets. His eyes were small, but remarkably piercing, and the aspect of his face was very eager and cruel; but that which made his looks most terrible was his teeth, which were pointed sharp, like a wolf's, so that when he displayed them he looked more like a beast of prey than a natural man. This peculiarity, however, was not due to his birth, but was rather brought about, as I learned, through living many years a captive among cannibal savages, whose practice it is to file their teeth after this fashion. In addition to this disfigurement his ears were slit, and he had a long white scar quartered down his tawny cheek; in short, he was as ill-looking and horrid a scoundrel as ever I did see.

'Twas, as I say, high noon, and matters stood thus, when, of a sudden, the clamor of my persecutors was stilled as by enchantment, and the sound of horse with the jingling of harness struck on my ear; and, casting my eye in that direction, I perceived a company of ladies and gentlemen with their servants, all very richly mounted, drawing hither. I took not much heed of them to discern who they were, being callous sick with the pain and insult I had suffered so many hours, until they drew near within a stone's cast to see what sport was forward, when Rodrigues jumping down from his stone bench, and making them a mighty respectful obeisance of his battered hat with its broken feather, my curiosity was pricked, and I once more looked that way. Then my heart sank lower than ever, and I would have been thankful had my face been beat out of all recognition; for foremost among the company was Lady Biddy Fane, and 'twas clear by the anger in her face that she recognized me. Yet, the next moment was I glad, and my heart was lifted up with a savage exultation; for now, thinks I, she will see to what degradation and ruin hath she brought a man of promise by her cruelty.

I do not think there ever was in the whole world a young woman so beautiful as Lady Biddy Fane; nor is there like to be again. Had I not thought so, should I have abandoned myself to despair because of her cruelty? Nay, nor should I have had this history to tell. And yet may there be women as straight and fairly proportioned as she, though none more so; and others with a skin of that rare pale clearness; and others, again, with eyes as large and dark and spirited, with sweet lips lined with snowy teeth, with a perfect nose (shapely as any Greek's) and wavy, nut-brown hair; still, I say, you shall not find another one woman in whom are combined the graces of so many together, with a spirit so lofty, noble, fearless, and faithful as hers. I might

discourse of her beauty for many pages, and yet fail, for want of words, to do her justice; but to make an end of this matter briefly, I say, again, she was incomparable.

On her right hand was my uncle, Sir Bartlemy Pengilly, Knight, the same who adventured with Sir Walter Raleigh in the quest for gold upon the Oronoque; and a hale, lusty old man he was, very personable, with shining white hair curled closely over his head, and a well-clipped beard; on her left hand was Sir Harry Smidmore, a young man of good parts, as I must acknowledge, albeit I hated him exceedingly, by reason of his standing in better grace with Lady Biddy Fane than any other of her suitors, and they were as numerous as butterflies over a fair garden on a summer's day. Besides these three were many friends of theirs of very good condition; but they enter not into this history, so enough is said of them.

Now, the rabble, thinking this company was drawn up for amusement, presently began to make sport of me; and one caught up a dead cat, which had served before, and flung it at me, and another a cabbage stump, which had likewise served; and a third, finding nothing handier than a broken pantile, was about to cast that, when Sir Harry Smidmore, with the flat of his sword, fetched him a clap on the arm that made him think better of it. Then Lady Biddy, with scorn and disgust on her countenance, turned away, and the whole company followed her thence, whispering together, and all very grave; for it was known that I was Sir Bartlemy's nephew, and a kinsman of Lady Biddy's, and that I had disgraced them before their friends.

After them went Rodrigues also, at a brisk pace to keep up with the horse. They had not been gone long when there came two of the sheriff's men with a cord to loose me, whereupon, seeing that I was about to be taken from the pillory, the whole rout that were in the square took to their heels as though a tiger were about to be let loose on them; for I was a man of terror for many miles about, and was known as "Ben of the Woods."

The sheriff's men first freed my hands from the boards, and, making fast my arms about me with their cord, they unlocked the headpiece, and then, having given me a draught from a pitcher, for I reeled like one in liquor being taken down, they led me up the High Street to the Dolphin Inn, and so into the great room there, where at a table sat the justice who had condemned me to the pillory, with Sir Bartlemy Pengilly, Sir Harry Smidmore, and some others; and against the wall in the shadow I spied Rodrigues.

Being brought to the end of the table facing this company, the justice made me a discourse, and the gist of his matter was that, out of respect for Sir Bartlemy, he had taken me from the pillory before my time, and would absolve me from further punishment if I would give my word to be of better conduct henceforth and agree to the proposal Sir Bartlemy was about to make.

Then Sir Bartlemy, pushing aside the bottle that stood before him, leaned forward and addressed me thus:

"Ben," says he, "I am heartily ashamed of you, and with the greater reason because you are not ashamed of yourself. Look at me, rogue! Do you see that my eyes are full of tears? 'Tis for shame that you are my nephew that I weep, and not for pity, for I do assure you, sir" (turning to the justice), "I loved this fellow, and not so long since neither; a brave-looking and comely man he was but a year ago; of good parts and great promise, whom I had been proud to call my son; and a brave man he should be by reason that his father endured manfully much hardship in adventuring under Sir Francis Drake, and died beside Sir Richard Grenville fighting those fifteen great galleons of the Spaniard. But what a base, desperate rascal are you" (turning again to me in anger) "to abandon yourself to despair, to yield up everything without a struggle and at the first shot of adversity, bringing dishonor upon your family thus! Had you but yourself to think of, vagabond? Had your father thought only of his own comfort, would he willingly have endured hardship and privation, or sought to face the Spanish guns? 'Twas the honor and glory of his queen he thought of before all; and had you truly loved your cousin, you would have set up her happiness before your own, and done naught to make her blush for so base a subject."

"Ay, surely!" cries the justice, frowning upon me.

"Yet must we not be too hard on the fellow, neither," says Sir Bartlemy, turning again to him; "for 'tis not as if he had forsaken a life of pain for one of pleasure, but quite the contrary; for he was light-hearted and gay before this cruel stroke; and now what creature on the face of this smiling world is more deplorable? And, truly, for a man to abandon himself to a life of such desolation and misery as he passes in the woods, his mind must be unstrung, and all its music turned to discord; and there is naught, I hear, like disappointment in love to unsettle the reason, though nothing of the sort has ever troubled mine; for if one lass frowned I'd quickly find another who'd smile; and I warrant," says he, merrily, with a sly dig at the stout old justice—"I warrant you have often done the same, Master Anthony."

"Let us go to the point, Sir Bartlemy—to the point," said the justice, severely.

"That will I with no more ado. Look you, rascal," says my uncle, thumping the table and bending his brows on me, "you have done little that I should love you, and much to undo the love I bore you; yet will I make an effort to save you from disgrace for your father's sake—and something for your own—for, God knows, you are a wretch as much to be pitied as hated; so here to the point. I am bent upon getting that treasure which lies, as we know full well, beyond the Oronoque, in order that it fall not into the hands of the Spaniard. 'Tis too late for me to make this venture under my own command, though I fain would; but a worthy commander have I found, and under him you shall take service as his lieutenant and second in command, and share the profits of this enterprise in due proportion."

"Wait!" cries the justice; "here surely is a mistake! You cannot intend to place this fellow taken from the pillory next in position to your commander!"

"He is my brother's son," replies Sir Bartlemy, "and I have faith that he will bear himself well when this present distemper of mind shall be blown off by the wholesome sea gales; for the rest, this matter concerns the crew of the ship and the commander. If they are willing, should I object?"

"But are they willing?" asks the justice. "There is the point."

"Here is the ablest man of the crew—one who has sailed with Drake, gone through many perilous adventures, and been himself a master. Hear what he says. Speak up, Rodrigues."

Rodrigues came out of the shadow, and, pointing his finger at me, says he: "That man is worth any ten men of our crew, and such a man a crew needs for master. We want no puppets, but men who can fight and suffer with stiff lips." Then he dropped back into the shadow again.

I was grateful to this man. Hope—that so long had lain dead within me—sprang up to life, and an eager desire for wild adventure seized upon me. And at that moment the door at the end of the room over against the head of the table opened, and Lady Biddy Fane came into the room; then my imagination, already kindled, blazed up with a mad conception of winning untold gold, glory, and honor—all to lay at her feet, with the possibility that she might accept them and me.

But, lord! there was little in her aspect to encourage such a hope, as she stood there erect and scornful, her pretty brows bent in angry scorn as she looked on me, tapping her silk skirt impatiently with her riding-whip. But this did not daunt my spirit, for I knew how sweet those brows were when they unbent, and that her dainty hand was more apt to caress than to strike.

While my heart was aflame with this sudden return of passion, the justice spoke:

"What says the commander? There the point is, I take it."

"Speak up, Sir Harry," says Sir Bartlemy.

"I will have him for my lieutenant as willingly as I would make him my friend," says Sir Harry Smidmore.

Hearing this my heart being filled with feeling rebelled against my reason, for I knew not until that moment who was to be the commander of this expedition.

"Now, Ben," says Sir Bartlemy, "you have the chance to redeem the past—ay, more than that—to make us love you as we never loved you yet. Will you accept the offer freely made by us?"

"What!" says I to myself, "win gold and honors for Smidmore to lay at her feet? Never!" And so I laughed with a brutal scorn and shook my head.

"An obstinate, contumacious rascal," cries Sir Bartlemy, with one of those sea oaths which he was more free to utter than I have been to set down here; "yet," says he, softening in a moment, "must we bear with him by reason of his misfortunes to the utmost limits. I have failed; plead thou for him, dear girl" (turning to Lady Biddy), "or he must go back again to the pillory."

"Ay, with all my heart," says Lady Biddy, advancing; "and, as you love me, sir," bending slightly to the justice, "I do beg you to favor my pleading. Send him not back to the pillory, for sure when that, together with my uncle's gentle, kind persuasion, fails to win him to a decent behavior, 'tis evident that a sharper remedy is needed for his disorder. Prythee, then, dear sir, send him to the whipping-post; there to be soundly whipped."

"Why, so I will," cries the justice cheerfully, clapping his fist on the table; "for I've heard no better suggestion this bout. To the whipping-post he shall go."

"Not alive," I muttered; and then straining with all my might I burst the cords that bound me, and turned to the door; whereupon the sheriff's men threw themselves before me. But one I took by the throat and the other by the shoulder, and swinging them together I flung them against the wall with such force that the oak panels cracked again, and they sank to the ground like things of clay. Then I strode out of the room and thence into the pure air, and no one had the stomach to stay me.

CHAPTER II.

I AM TAKEN AGAIN BY JACK GEDDES AND OTHERS, AND RESCUED BY RODRIGUES.

Sir Bartlemy's house was built upon a hill not far from St. Maw's and looked over Falmouth Haven to Penny-come-quick. His estate was mostly woodlands, and skirting the river Fal extended north beyond Philligh and east as far as Tregony. In the midst of these woods had I lived for many months unmolested, the worthy old knight, with good intent, bidding his foresters let me kill what game I would for my use; and here had I built me a hut as a shelter against the inclemency of the weather, thatching it with broom and sods of turf. But twas a mistaken kindness on his part, for this sufferance only tended to complete that state of savagery into which I was sinking.

From childhood I have loved the woods, and found delight in studying the secrets of nature—the growth of herbs, the places where they may be found; the ways of birds and beasts, and the like; and when my hopes were all cast over, I had fled thither, saying, "Here is a mistress whose smile is not to be wooed in vain!" And, indeed, for a troubled spirit I know no comfort so soothing as the woods after a spring shower, when all is fresh and sweet, and every little blade of grass seems to smile. For the most part my state was that of utter solitude. Many a day I heard no sound but my own footfall, and saw nothing but the still trees. For weeks and weeks I met no human creature; yet I had no inclination to seek a companion. But at times my nature would revolt against this unnatural condition of solitude, and a mad thirst for debauchery would seize me. Then with my bow would I kill a buck, and, selling it to those who were ever ready to buy venison of me at a fourth of its value, I would go into Truro and spend my money in some gross frolic like that which had brought me to the pillory (as I have shown).

And now, having dwelt long enough on my originals, yet not too long, for I would show truly to what degradation may a man bring himself by self-abandonment, I will continue this history without any further digression.

To my hut, then, in the wood did I betake myself after my escape from Truro, refreshing myself on the way with a plunge in the cool river; and being arrived at my home, as I may call it, I went to a hollow oak hard by, which served me as a storehouse, to see if aught was there to satisfy the cravings of my stomach; but finding nothing save a hare which I had hung there before leaving, and which now stank, for I had been absent best part of three days, so that I could not eat it, hungered though I was, I picked up my bow, which also I kept in this place, and, taking a turn in the wood, I had presently the chance to kill a wood-pigeon. Then I built a fire with dry sticks, of which there was no lack at this season, laid my pigeon in the embers, and when it had lain there as long as my patience would endure, I stripped off the skin and feathers, and devoured it, using my fingers for fork and my teeth for knife; and thus having partly quieted my stomach, though I could have eaten half a dozen such small game, but was too tired to seek more, I threw myself on the earth within my hut, and fell asleep at once, nor did any pricking of conscience trouble me in the least.

And here I slept on till about eight o'clock in the evening, as I judge, when an unwonted sound awoke me; for I had contracted the habit of sleeping, as it were, with my ears open. But being mighty heavy with sleep I did no more than sit up and glance stupidly through the opening of my hut. I saw naught but a tranquil glow over the west through the still leaves of the trees; and a nightingale then bursting out into song at no great distance, I concluded there was nothing to fear; and throwing myself on the ground, in a minute I was again sound asleep.

Nothing disturbed me after that through the night, but soon after daybreak, as I take it, my ears were assailed by a confusion of sounds, and ere I could spring to my feet, a fellow threw himself upon my chest, another knelt upon my legs, and a third laid strong hands upon my shoulders, and in a trice I felt cords cutting into my arms and binding them to my sides.

"You escape not this time, Master Benet," growled a voice, and in truth my captors were as good as this fellow's words, for enough cord was bestowed about me as would have trussed up an elephant. My captors were six; all stout fellows and well armed, amongst whom I recognized one of the men that had served me the day before, and I cursed my folly that I had lain myself open to be taken in this way; for I might have foreseen the pursuit had I given it a thought. However, cursing was no good; there was I clapped up and in a fair way to get my punishment doubled, and more than that. And, as there was no likelihood of escape, the only thing left me was to bear my ill-luck with the fortitude of despair. Yet my heart sank as I saw them take up my bow which I had laid beside me on going to sleep, for I knew I should have it no more, and how could I get food or aught else without that when I got my liberty again? Better to take my life, or rob me for ever of my liberty, than take that by which I lived, thought I.

They haled me out into the open, and there for the first time this day I spied the gipsy Rodrigues. He was seated on a fallen tree, with his elbows on his knees, and his jaws in his hands, smoking tobacco in the end of a clay pipe; and now he had his keen eyes fixed on me, watching how I took this new buffet of fortune with the same look he had worn the day before, when I stood in the pillory.

I guessed it was his step that had aroused me the fore-going evening, and that he led on the sheriff's men to catch me, which was pretty near the truth of the matter, as I shall presently show.

To make sure that I should not escape, the men tied me up to a tree; then they proceeded to regale themselves from a store of meat, with which their wallets were well filled, making very merry with me the time; after which they consulted together in a low voice; and, one of them having parleyed for a few minutes with Rodrigues, they all stretched themselves out on the soft

sword, and in a short time were asleep and snoring like so many swine, which surprised me somewhat, seeing that now the sun was getting pretty high.

For some while Rodrigues sat as still as any carved image, smoking his pipe and looking at me; then up he gets, and passing the sleepers as silently as might be, he comes to my side; and putting first his finger on his lips, and jerking his thumb over his shoulders with a sly leer to bid me be silent, he pulls a letter from his breast and showed me my name written upon it. This he thrusts back in his breast, and, after a glance over his shoulder to make sure all were still sleeping, he cut the cords that bound me to the tree with his dagger, and leads me a good stonecast distant, where we might converse in a low tone without being heard.

Here he again lugged out the letter, and, spreading it out (the seal being already broke), he held it before my eyes to read; for he had been careful not to sever the cords that tethered my arms to my side.

It was my uncle's hand and signature.

"You have read this?" says I.

Rodrigues shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, "I had been a fool else," and then says he, with the utmost assurance:

"I was to have given it to you last night, but you were sleeping so sweetly I had no heart to wake you. Besides, I thought you would more readily listen to his advice if you were in bonds than if you were free."

"So you betrayed me?"

"Not at once. I led the fellows up and down in the moonlight best part of the night, that they might be overcome with fatigue this morning, and so give me the opportunity of some serious conversation with you. Now read what Sir Bartlemy has to say."

I was in no position to resent this insolence; so I did what was next best—swallowed it, and followed his advice; and this is what I read:

"NEPHEW BENET,—You are no longer safe in my woods, for I have no power to shield you from the law. Even now the officers are out to apprehend you, and God knows what may befall if you are taken. If you have any feeling for me, any love for your father's memory, or any respect for yourself, you will escape this new shame. My ships lie in the haven ready to depart, and Sir Harry is still willing to accept you as his companion and friend in the noble enterprise now toward. I do beg and implore you be not a fool and a villain as well, but quickly accept this offer. Rodrigues, who bears this, does undertake to carry you safe to Flushing, where a boat lies in readiness to take you on board the *Sure Hawk*, where you shall find all comfort and good cheer, to say naught of the loving gratitude of thine old uncle,

"BARTLEMY PENGILLY."

This gentle letter did somewhat move my heart; and surely its sensibility had been gone beyond all recovery had it not responded to so warm an appeal; and my first feeling was that I would do his bidding. Then I bethought me what a mean and sneaking thing it was, after refusing this offer when I was free to accept it when I was not free; and what a hang-dog cur I should appear to all the crew when my story became known, and how (under the mask of pity and patronage) Sir Harry Smidmore must scorn me for a paltry fellow. And with that came the remembrance of Lady Biddy's contempt; and, coupling these two together, I was wrought again with fierce jealousy and hatred; and I did resolve that I would die ten thousand deaths rather than give them this food for their scorn.

Rodrigues, subtly watching me, must have seen the madness in my eye, for he whispered at this point—

"Sir Harry is wondrous eager to get you."

"Curse Sir Harry!" I muttered.

"Not I," says he, with a quiet laugh. "He'll give me a score of gold pieces if I take you to him; and no wonder, for he will be well repaid with caresses when he takes the news to Lady Biddy."

"You'll get no pieces from him, nor he kisses from her, through me, I promise you."

"Your ears will be cropped for a certainty if you are taken back to Truro." And then, as I made no reply, he adds, "You are minded to break your uncle's heart rather than your own pride."

"Nay," says I, "there's a way by which I may spare him shame, and myself as well."

"Are you man enough to thrust a knife in your own heart?" says he.

"Ay!" says I joyfully; "do but try me. Give but my forearm fair play and lend me your dagger. You shall be rewarded, I warrant, when you tell Lady Biddy I am no more. Or do you thrust it into me if you doubt the use I should make of the knife. I promise you I will not awake a single sleeper with my groans."

He nodded approvingly, but made no attempt to take me at my word.

"Life isn't worth much," says he, "to a fool. And 'tis only a fool who thinks there's never another loaf to be got when he's eaten the last crust. Look at me," spreading his arms and surveying his rags—"a prince last month, a beggar today. What of that? I'll be a king next year. And so may you be," he adds, after a pause. But that did not tempt me; so presently he goes on:

"If you had seen what I have seen, and if you were as hideous as I am, and as old, yet you would not talk of ending your life. If you had seen as I have seen"—speaking slowly, yet with passion, as, through his half-closed eyes, he seemed to be looking at what he described—"a land where the forests are flower-gardens, more fair than hand of man can make; where trees—not like these stunted things, which are but bushes by comparison—where trees I say, seem hung with precious gems, and waters run on beds of gold and silver, and every rock is dazzling crystal; where rich fruits tempt the appetite they never cloy; where flying birds are like the flash of gems, and their song more sweet than your musician ever heard in dreams; where the sun never parches nor cold winds bite; where the gentle air is brisk as wine and charged with the scent of leagues of flowers: if you had seen that land, I say, you would want to see it again before you died."

These hints of southern glories I had heard before from my uncle; though between his speech and this poetic gipsy's there was all the difference betwixt north and south.

"To see this land might tempt you to oblige Sir Bartlemy," says he. Then, after a bit, he continues, "But it does not, I perceive. You know the intent of this enterprise—first, to gratify your uncle's whim; and, next, to enrich Sir Harry, that he may wed Lady Biddy. You have no relish to help him that way—to come home with a gruesome face to pull the joy-bells at their wedding?"

"No, by the Lord! that will I never do!" says I.

"Then your answer to that letter is 'No'?"

"A thousand times 'No'!"

"You refuse the offer?"

"I do."

"I see you mean what you say," says he, looking me keenly in the eye, "and I am right glad it is so. I am not mistaken in you, Pengilly. I saw there was mettle in you from the first, else I had not taken all this trouble on myself to win you. Had you said 'Yes' to that letter you would have had me for your enemy, and it would have gone ill with you, I promise. As it is, I am your friend, as I will quickly prove. For, first, I will give you freedom, and after that a voyage to the south; whence you shall speedily return, your ship laden with gold: then shall you have possession of your mistress. All this I promise; ay, and more, for you shall, if you will, revenge yourself of the insults this proud maid has heaped upon you, and humble the man who would have taken her from you, so that he shall not dare to show his face before her. What say you to this?"

I could say nothing on the moment, being greatly perplexed by this unexpected turn; and ere I could command my senses to inquire of Rodrigues how he purposed compassing that which he proposed, we were both mightily startled by hearing, at no great distance behind us, the sound of men's voices; and presently one above the rest set to hallooing "Jack Geddes! Jack Geddes!" which was the name of that sheriff's man who had bound me as aforesaid. Then on the other side we heard the men who lay asleep rousing each other with a great confusion of sound that showed they had discovered my escape. Thus we stood between the party which had taken me and a second party sent after to help them. And the chance of getting freedom, to say nothing of riches and my sweetheart, looked more unlikely than ever. Yet did we contrive to escape, as I shall set forth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III.

BY A CUNNING STRATAGEM I AM GOT OUT OF JACK GEDDES' HANDS, AND BROUGHT ABOARD THE "SURE HAWK."

The two parties of sheriff's men were distant from each other, as I took it by the sound of their voices, no more than a hundred yards, so that we could not burst away in any direction without hazard of being seen; and a foolhardy hazard it had been, for Jack Geddes and his party were armed with muskets, and would not have scrupled to use them. Yet how to escape did not appear until Rodrigues (as luck would have it) spied a fairly deep hole which had served at one time for a sawpit, and to this he hurried me, and we both leaped in, and there, in a twinkling, did he scrape aside the loose sawdust that lay at the bottom; and in the trough thus hastily made, I, seeing his intent, threw myself full length, and as quickly was smothered over from top to toe with the sawdust, so that nothing was visible of me.

By this time the two parties were joined, and there they set up a great shouting and cursing because I was no longer bound to the tree as I had been left. And not only did they curse me, but they cursed Rodrigues as heartily, vowing they would pepper him with their bullets as a faithless villain if they saw him. Whereupon this, Rodrigues, laying himself prone upon my body, set a most dismal groaning, like one in pain, hearing which Jack Geddes and the rest came rushing to the pit. Seeing him there all alone and doubled up as though he had been broke, half a dozen, in one breath, began to question him how he came there, what was amiss with him, etc. To which he replies with a groan:

"'Tis all along of that Pengilly! I was but dozing, when I heard one cry 'Jack Geddes'" (here a groan), "and the same moment I saw Pengilly with a mighty wrench tear himself from the tree. Up I started and after him, when, being but half awake, I threw myself in this cursed hole, and here have I broke my arm, I do believe. But do you leave me here (where I am as well as elsewhere), and catch the villain. I would not for the loss of both arms miss seeing his ears cropped."

"Ay! we will catch him: have no fear," says Geddes; "scatter yourselves, my fine fellows, and shoot down the rascal if you do but sight him, for we shall suffer for it if he escape us."

Whereupon the men, more concerned for themselves than for any hurt of Rodrigues, started off like hounds unleashed, and each, in his several direction, bent upon taking me again alive or dead. And it was none too soon, for the sawdust entering my mouth and nostrils when I breathed, I was pretty nigh choked—to say nothing of the oppression I suffered from the cords that pinned my arms and Rodrigues lying upon my back.

So when they were gone and Rodrigues, standing up and peering over the edge, said that all was clear, I lifted my head, shaking off the sawdust and spitting out that which had got into my throat, and breathed again.

"Now," said Rodrigues; "Now may we escape, for being all scattered, our pursuers are less likely to take us."

"Do but cut this cord," says I, "and I warrant not any two shall take me."

"Ay," says he, "I will cut your bonds with a good heart. But first you must swear to be secret and silent; nay, you must swear also to be obedient to my direction without question or murmuring, else will I leave you here to fare for yourself."

I promised him this, for I was in no position to haggle over terms; yet my promise was not enough for him, but he, taking his dagger by the blade, held it to my mouth, and would have me kiss the cross of it, swearing by that sign as a Christian to obey him in every particular. And this I did, the more readily because of the cord which Jack Geddes had knotted so cruelly about my arms that it bit into my flesh to my intolerable hurt.

Having thus made me take oath, he cut the cord, and I was free; yet for some time could I not use my arms with any freedom, by reason they were so benumbed and bruised. Nevertheless, I managed to scramble up out of the pit after Rodrigues, and thence, I following on his heels, with the stealth of any cats, we pushed our way by bush and briar through the thickest part of the wood, where, at sight of an enemy, we might lie down and be unseen. On we went, Rodrigues leading and keeping the sun well before, for a matter of three miles or thereabouts, without encountering any of my pursuers; and then, perceiving that if we kept on in this direction we must shortly come to Flushing, which lies (as I have said) on the hither side of the Fal, opposite Penny-come-quick, I twitched Rodrigues by the skirt and gave him to understand this, adding that there was not a fisherman there but knew me, and would have me hanged if he could; and this was true, for I was known and feared all round and about these parts, and held to be a wild man of the woods, very dreadful and dangerous, and a bogey to frighten children withal.

"I know well enough where I am going," says he.

"That may be," says I; "yet this is but a stepping out of the frying-pan into the fire, so far as I am concerned."

Whereupon he taps the handle of his dagger as a sign to me to remember my oath, and that is all the satisfaction I got.

So on we go again, still keeping the sun before up; and descending the hill anon we come to the river-side, and here Rodrigues stops, looking to the right and left, as if uncertain; then, putting his hand over his mouth, he gives the cry of

"Cuckoo!" as natural as ever I did hear, and straight there comes an answer in the same manner from a thicket further up the river-side. Thither we made our way, but with great care, now being no more than a furlong or thereabouts from the village, screened off by a jutting point of land well timbered; and soon, passing through the said thicket, we came on a little creek, in which lay a boat, wherein sat a couple of seamen as tawny as Rodrigues, but stouter and better favored, albeit one lacked an eye.

All about this creek there lay an open space, from which an alley ran up into the wood; and, lest he should be observed, Rodrigues would not advance beyond the brush, whence he signaled his fellows to know if all were safe. And he with the one eye, rising up and stretching himself as if he were weary, spied up the alley and all round and about, and then signaled, by winking his one eye, that he could see nothing; whereupon Rodrigues bade me cross the open quickly, get into the boat, and lie down under the sail that was there. He came not himself, but was gone when I got to the boat and cast my eye round for him. And here I may tell what I afterwards learnt concerning him. He made his way back with all speed to the sawpit, and lay there as if he had never budged when the men came back from their search after me, still feigning to be greatly hurt with his arm, though happily assured that it was not broken.

Meanwhile I, following his direction without knowing what the end thereof might be, got into the boat, and, lying down in the bottom, was covered over with the sail-cloth by one of the mariners, while the other loosed the boat from its moorings; and this was done none too quickly, for as the fellow was stepping into the boat from untying of the headline, who should come down into the open but John Geddes himself, as I knew full well by his voice.

"Hold, there!" says he, hailing the seamen. "Have you seen a great, sturdy fellow in a leather jerkin pass this way?"

"Not we," replies one; "and we've been on the lookout for such a man since yesterday afternoon—and a pox to him!"

"And, pray, who set you to wait for him?" asked Geddes, and his voice told that he was now close by the boat's side.

"Why, that's my master's business that sent us, and none of yours," said the fellow.

"Hold your clapper, Ned, and lend a hand with your oar," cries his mate, "for the boat is aground, and I can't shove her off. Yo, ho! all together! yo, ho?—there we be! Now off we go, Pengilly or no Pengilly, for, curse me," says he, "my in'ards will stand this griping no longer."

Then there sprang up a dissension between the two seamen and Geddes, who would have them ferry him over to Penny-come-quick, and they would not; and he, laying the stock of his musket on the gunwale to draw the boat so that he might step in, one of them flung it off, while the other fetched him a blow on the head with his oar that laid Master Geddes senseless on his back. Then says the first to the other—

"Lay to, Ned, for God's sake, or mischief will come of this."

All this while I lay still under the sail-cloth, expecting, for the most part, nothing less but to feel Geddes' foot step on to me. But his business being so concluded, I heard nothing more but the dip of the oars, the ripple of water under me, and the working of the rowlocks, until one of the men said to the other, "Pull under her lee, that we be not seen from the shore"; and the next minute the boat bumped, and the sail-cloth being whipped off, I found that we lay under the side of a fine, high ship.

"Up you go, comrade, quick," says Ned (he with one eye).

Then up the rope steps that hung by the ship's side I sped, and being come on deck was as speedily hustled down into the dark hold below, where they who had followed me down barricaded me round about with divers barrels, bidding me lie quiet until I should be told it was safe to venture forth.

And all this time I knew not that I had come as a runaway aboard my uncle's ship the *Sure Hawk*; but so it was.

CHAPTER IV.

I COME TO THE CANARIES IN BETTER PLIGHT THAN I STARTED.

When the seamen had hidden me away, so that no man not knowing the ways of the ship could well come at me save by discharging the hold of its stores, one brought me some meat and drink, and then I was left to myself in the dark. For some time all was quiet above, but about noon, as I judge, I heard a great bustle on the decks of pulling ropes and the like, and this continued all day until the evening, when the anchors were drawn up and the ship made sail. And the reason of this commotion was that Rodrigues, having got away from the sheriff's men, under pretense of seeking relief for his arm, sped him to Sir Bartlemy Pengilly to tell him how I had refused his offer, but had nevertheless gone aboard the *Sure Hawk* to escape the law; whereupon the knight, mightily pleased with this turn, ordered Sir Harry Smidmore, who then lay at his house, to lose no time in departing, but to take advantage of the breeze then springing up to set sail as soon as might be; and the stores being all aboard and the crew in readiness, Sir Harry set about this business at once. When the men stood at the anchor ready to heave away, Sir Bartlemy and Lady Biddy took an affectionate farewell of Sir Harry, and bidding him with tears God-speed and a happy return, quitted the ship. And so about eight o'clock that evening the *Sure Hawk* (with her companion, the *Adventurer*), sailed out of Falmouth Haven with me, Benet Pengilly, in the hold.

When we were fairly out to sea, Rodrigues came down to me with another fellow bearing a lantern, and bade me come out, and I was not sorry; for besides that it was extremely stuffy down there, so that there was no breathing with any comfort, the ship had begun to roll and pitch in such a manner that I feared every moment nothing less but to be crushed by some chest or barrel being thrown upon me, though, indeed, there was naught to fear in that respect, as I learned when I became better acquainted with the manner of these things. But, indeed, the sea ran unconscionably high, and the ship labored painfully all that night and the next day, and after that the next night again was no better, so that it was surprising to me that we had not foundered. Yet that was the last thing I feared, for, being miserably ill and as sick as any dog, I do truly think that had the ship split I should have made no effort to save myself.

I had been stowed away between decks among some bales of goods packed securely in the fore part of the vessel, and here I lay, with no comfort but a stone jar of water, until, waking from a sound sleep, it might be about noon and were now at sea three days, I perceived that the storm had greatly abated, and that my stomach was no longer qualmish, but quickened with a huge hunger—as well it might be after my long fast, etc. Then, feeling brisker than I had yet felt since we set sail, I sat up, and a savory smell sharpening my appetite, I got upon my legs, and so spied half a dozen seamen seated on chests under the light of the hatchway before a smoking mess of pork and pease. Thither I made my way, though not without difficulty, the ship still rolling immoderately, and begged civilly that they would let me eat with them. Whereupon one shoved the victuals toward me that I might help myself, but not a word, good or bad, did any of them speak, which was more noticeable because they had all been laughing and talking till they saw me. Presently a pipe sounded, and they all went up above; then down comes Rodrigues, and it was the first time I had seen him since we were at sea. He had on his sea skirt and large boots all running with water, for it still was exceedingly foul weather, and his hat tied down about his ears with a red kerchief. But he was in good spirits, and asked me cheerfully how I did as he seated himself beside me and helped himself to meat; and having answered his inquiry, I told him how the seamen scowled at me, and begged to know if I had done aught to deserve this ill-will.

"Why, yes," says he; "for had it not been to save you from the catchpoles, we should never have ventured to sea in such a rising gale. We have had no rest since we left Falmouth, and like at any moment to have gone to the bottom. For aught we know, our consort is lost, and all hands with her, not having been seen these two days. And this is a great loss, besides being a bad beginning to our enterprise, and all is set down to your charge. However, it is in your power to make them amends and win their love, and I make no doubt you will."

"With all my heart," says I, "if you do but show me how."

"All in good time," says he, tearing with his pointed teeth the flesh off a knuckle-bone of pork that he held in his hands; "all in good time. We can do nothing yet, but I look to you for help by-and-by, else had I not run all this risk for you. And yet," continues he, after a pause, flinging the knuckle-bone behind him—"yet it might be well for you to make friends with the captain at once. He asked to see you this morning."

"And who is this captain?" I asked, my curiosity awakening.

"Why, Sir Harry Smidmore, to be sure. Did I not tell you?"

"No," says I, moodily.

"Then you might have guessed it."

And this was quite true, if I had been in a humor for guessing.

"I have been trapped and despatched to sea to please Lady Biddy," says I, savagely.

"Well, you'll bear me no grudge for that. There was no way to save you but by getting you aboard the ship." Then, glancing round to see we were alone, he adds, dropping his voice, "And if Sir Harry Smidmore made to sea with you before you could escape, that he might please his sweetheart and keep you and her well asunder, 'twas no fault of mine. Don't you like it, Pengilly?"

I ground my teeth for response.

"Would you be even with him for this trick?" he asked, in the same low tone, and with a sinister leer.

"Aye, that I would!"

"So would I in your place," says he. "If a man served me that way, I'd—"

Here he stopped, and taking up a jack-knife, he stuck it in the deal board that served as a bench, and pressed on it till the blade came out on the other side, and while he did this his sinewy hand grasped the board as if it were a throat, and his lips were drawn back close to his pointed teeth; then he looked sidelong at me, saying never a word, as if to know how I took this hint.

"I am no murderer," says I, terrified by his manner as much as by his suggestion.

"Why, who said you were?" says he, with great show of indignation. "Cannot a man by steady endeavor go through a difficulty as I have gone through that board with this knife without doing a mischief? What a fool should I be to counsel you to such an end when our true success depends upon you being good friends with our captain. Nay," he adds, "if I thought you would curb your spirit to it, I would beg you to take Sir Harry's hand, when he offers it to you, and accept his friendship."

"That can I never do."

"So I thought. Howsomever, you must do him no injury or insult at this present. And, harkye, I know it for a fact that he wants to give into your hand a sum of money entrusted to him by your uncle for your particular use, that you might furnish yourself presently with an equipment worthy of his nephew; and this you must not refuse to take. Laugh as scornfully as you will, but you must take it, and I will tell you for why. When we get to a port, you will have to make the crew merry in return for the hardships they have suffered on your account. You must win them to your side, for we can do nothing else."

"They shall have every penny I get, and welcome. But tell me what you mean when you say we can do nothing without having the men on our side?"

"I mean," says he, "that without them you will get neither riches nor your sweetheart."

"And how, having them, am I to win these ends?"

"Leave that to me. I have promised the achievement, and if you do but work patiently upon my instructions, I will not fall short of my word. More than this I can not now tell you, but you shall know more hereafter. For the present, you can do nothing but win the affection of the men, and the captain also."

All this was a great mystery to me, and I could nohow fathom to the bottom of it: this only was clear, that I must follow Rodrigues' bidding, not only because I was bound to do so in a certain measure by reason of my oath, but also because it was good policy. So when I had refreshed myself by sousing my head in a bucket of water, I went above, and, holding on by the bulwarks, was much amazed with the sight of the heaving seas, which I had never before seen as now, all around me, and the way in which the great ship would dive down into the hollow of a wave as if to perdition, and yet the next moment ride upon the crest of it as light as any duck.

While I was standing here, one of the seamen came to me, saying that the captain would speak with me; so I went with him into the roundhouse under the poop deck where Sir Harry was, and very cheerful and bright this young man looked in his sea dress. Then, with a noble, easy air, he begs me to sit down, and, sitting himself, discoursed about the late storm, telling me how we should certainly have been all lost but for the admirable skill and exertions of the mate, Rodrigues (and this every one did allow), and all with perfect self-command and natural civility, as though we had been the best friends in the world. But he did not offer me his hand to take, and I was glad of this, for I could not have taken it without shame, feeling as I still did towards him.

"However," says he, "the work is over, and, please God, the first part of our voyage will soon be made; then you will be free to do as you like—either to go back to England or to go on with me. For I have not the power to hold you a prisoner, nor have I the wish to keep you with me, except as a friend. That is for you to decide, and I hope, with all my heart, you will decide to share in this enterprise, and return with me a richer and a happier man than ever you could have been had you not sailed with us. And that your choice may be perfectly free, here is a purse of money that Sir Bartlemy entrusted me with for your use. It will pay your voyage home, but if you have need of more for your necessities, I shall be very happy to place my purse at your disposal."

I took the bag of money he offered, thanking him for his civility as well as my untutored tongue would allow. Then he rose, making me a graceful bow, and bade the man who waited at the door to take me to my cabin, which I found very neat and properly furnished, with everything necessary to my convenience, and two good suits of new clothes, besides shirts, stockings, etc.

Rodrigues was mightily pleased when he saw me in my new clothes and with my hair decently combed, and it seemed to me that the seamen eyed me with more respect than they had yet shown me; indeed, I found that this decency did elevate me in my own opinion a great deal, so that I thought better of myself and more hopefully than I had since the beginning of my misfortunes.

The wind continued very high (but prosperous) for nine days after that, and then, making the Canaries, we came into water as smooth as the heart of man could desire, and so cast anchor at Fuerteventura. And here we were very busy for three days, repairing the mischief done us by the storm, and all that time we saw nothing of the *Adventurer*, our consort, which was to have joined us there in case of being separated, so that we gave her up for lost, and I know not who was more cast down about this, Sir Harry Smidmore or Rodrigues. However, on the fourth day the missing ship bore in sight (to our great joy), and by nightfall was anchored alongside of us, but with one mast gone, and so sorely bruised that she looked not the same ship she had been. And it was curious to see how the crew of the *Adventurer*, coming on board the *Sure Hawk*, the men did hug each other and weep for gladness. Amongst them all the most joyful were Rodrigues and Ned Parsons, the seaman I have spoken of as having only one eye, and who was master aboard the *Adventurer*. But what damped Sir Harry's spirits greatly was this, that his dear friend, John Murray, who was captain on our consort, had been washed overboard in the storm, and was no more; and that the men might not see his grief, he went into his own cabin and shut the door, and I think there was no sad heart on board but his.

Presently Rodrigues came to my side, and says he:

"Now is the time to win the hearts of these men. I shall get leave from the captain for them to go ashore; do you give them something to make merry with."

I agreed to this with all my heart, and fetching the bag of gold from my cabin which Sir Bartlemy had sent, I bade him distribute every farthing amongst them; and this he did, giving every man equal share, so that each got over a pound, for there was the value of a hundred pounds in the bag, and the two crews numbered four score, as near as may be.

When he had thus made the "dividend," as he called it, Rodrigues told them that it was I who gave the money out of love for them, and the hardships they had borne on my account. Whereupon Ned Parsons cried he would do as much again and a hundred times more for so generous a gentleman, and bade his comrades give me a cheer, which they did with all their lungs, and three times. And I thought this Ned Parsons was a good friend to me, but he was not.

CHAPTER V.

TO MY MORTAL PERIL I OVERHEAR A SORDID SCHEME OF RODRIGUES AND NED PARSONS.

Sir Harry gave leave that all should go on shore who had a mind to, save only such as Parsons and Rodrigues should need to keep on board the *Adventurer* and the *Sure Hawk* for their protection; and Rodrigues bade all be gone, saying that he and Ned Parsons would watch the two ships during the night. So the men went off in the barge, one batch after the other, and last of all Sir Harry himself went also to refresh his spirits after the grief of losing his dear friend; and Parsons rowed him to shore. There were then left on the *Sure Hawk* none save Rodrigues and I. And I being heavy with sleep (it being by that time nine o'clock, as I think) threw myself on my cot within my cabin, and fell off in a doze. While I lay there Rodrigues came to my cabin and saw me by the light of the lamp, as I found out afterwards. But presently awaking, I rose up and went out on the deck, feeling the want of fresh air. And indeed the night would have tempted most men to go forth, being very fair and the moon vastly bright, as it is in those parts.

There was not a soul on the deck, for Rodrigues, seeing me asleep and all clear, had gone into the captain's storeroom to pilfer a bottle of wine; and so without design I sauntered on till coming, as chance would have it, to the main-mast of the ship, I came to a stand, and leaning my back against the stern so that I faced the moon, I fell on meditating on my lot. Whilst I stood there I heard the dip of oars; then the chink of glass as Rodrigues set down his bottles right over against where I stood, but on the other side of the great mast, and after that he went to the side and called over, "Come up, Ned, I've that will make us merry, though we be not ashore."

"For all that I would rather be ashore with our mates," replies Parsons in a grumbling voice as he comes up the side.

"And so we will, man, and many a jolly night will we spend with our mates—when we have no secrets to keep," replies Rodrigues. "Here we have it all to ourselves, and need fear nothing if the drink do give a loose to our tongues."

"Where's Pengilly? He went not ashore," says Parsons, when he had tumbled over the bulwarks on to the deck.

"Asleep in the coach where you see the light burning, and is sound as a log. Sit you down here, and we shall see him if he comes out, which is not likely."

So they sat down together on a chest facing the roundhouse, and just on the other side of the mast where Rodrigues had set the bottles, and presently began to drink and talk; yet still I kept where I was, with my back against the mast; firstly, because the moon seemed to spread a calm over my mind which I cared not to dispel, and after that because I became curious to know what they had to talk about.

"Well," says Parsons, in a more cheerful tone, after taking a drink, "how goes it?"

"Famously," replies Rodrigues, clacking his tongue against his teeth and pouring out more wine.

"Have you sounded the men? Have you opened out to them of our project?"

"Nay; not yet. Nor have you, I hope, or they will blab everything before they get sober again. I bade you keep a still tongue, Ned."

"And so I have. There's been other matters to think on. A rare time it has been with us to keep the ship afloat. But I did my part of the business."

"And bravely, I warrant. Tell me how you did it, Ned."

"I caught him a stroke on the head with a crow as he was at prayer, and heaved his body out into the sea by the galley port." 'Twas thus he had cruelly murdered Captain Murray.

"No one saw you!"

"Never a soul. He was missed in the morning, and all think he was washed over by a sea."

"Well, there's one out of the way. 'Twill be Smidmore's turn next."

"When?" asks Parsons.

"That's as hereafter may be. I'm for leaving everything till we have provisioned at Trinidado."

"And I'm for going at it at once. Curse this hanging fire when there's prize to be taken, I say. Now Murray is out of the way you will be made captain of the *Adventurer*, and I reckon I will be master in your place on the *Sure Hawk*. We are well armed and ammunitioned, and shall not lack provisions. Then why should we wait till we've been to Trinidado, I want to know?"

"Because we should have to victual again before going round to the South Sea, and we want no one to get wind of our intent before we're ready to fly our colors. It would be folly to spoil the venture for the sake of a week or two. Besides, we know not how the men will take it."

"How do we stand for men?" asks Parsons, in his grumbling tone again.

"Why, there's Black, and Jarvis, and Kelly, and all those of our old crew who served with us before—they may be depended on."

"That's thirteen men, and we two make fifteen, all told."

"These men, though they pretend to believe that we are going up the Orinoco after a mare's nest, are not such fools as to think that I design to end my days there."

"Ay!" says Parsons with a laugh, setting down his cup again. "Nor would they have been fools enough to engage on any such silly venture unless they felt sure something better was to come of it. Well, there's fifteen—go on."

"Of the rest there's a score as desperate follows as ever trod a deck, and ripe for any mischief."

"Would to Heaven we could have raked up more like them."

"The rest are fools; but sturdy, good seamen, for all that."

Here I was reminded of what I had previously remarked—viz., that there were two sorts of men in our crew and no third. One set were reckless, dare-devil, cursing rascals, and the other were as simple-minded as any children; but, as Rodrigues, said every one a hale, good seaman. And this was due to the cunning of Rodrigues, who, by reason of his knowing the parts to which we were bound, had been entrusted to choose a crew likely for the purpose.

"Well," says Parsons, "here are five-and-thirty men to back us at a sign, and a match for all the rest with their captain and your Pengilly as well. Now, here's my plan, Rodrigues, and if you will hear me you shall own that it is better than all your fiddle-faddle of waiting for this, that, and t'other."

"Well, out with it, Ned. You know that I have never refused to listen to advice, nor to act on it when I saw it was good; else had we never won our way."

"That's true, and I own but for your cursed cool judgment we should all have been strung up like so many weasels."

Over this interchange of civilities they drank another cup and shook hands. Then Parsons started off in high good-humor:

"Here's how I see it. Sir Harry will make you captain of the *Adventurer*; for why? There's no man so fit; and he'll very like make me master of this ship under him, as being best able to navigate her and the like. The men will be fairly divided between the two ships as heretofore. Now, as soon as we set sail I shall make it so cursedly uncomfortable for the foolish fellows of my crew that they shall pray to be exchanged into your ship. To this I shall persuade Sir Harry, taking in their place all those men disposed to our design."

"So we get all the simpletons under me, and all the desperadoes under you," says Rodrigues.

"That's it. And matters being so, I will open out our scheme to my crew, who will jump at it like sharks. Then the first calm night will we order things so that my men shall board your ship after binding Sir Harry, and make prisoner every mother's son: which done, you shall ask the company plump out whether they choose to join in our venture and make their fortunes, or whether they stick to their articles, and will go a searching for gold where there's naught but serpents and fevers. Who will refuse to join us then, eh?"

"Sir Harry, for a surety."

"Then overboard he goes, and away we sail south with joyous hearts, and no more dallying."

Rodrigues took the time of drinking another cup to consider. But little as I knew of this strange matter, I felt sure he would not agree to this proposal (being a very subtle, painful man), for if he thus parted with all the men proper to his desperate enterprise, what was to prevent Parsons deserting him and going whithersoever he pleased with his desperadoes?

"Yes," says Rodrigues, "your scheme might succeed, but it will be better to turn the tables about so that you send all the dependable men to me, and I send the others to you."

Parsons made no reply to this, whereby he revealed the secret treachery that was in his mind. But Rodrigues taking no notice of this, though he must have perceived it, continues cheerfully, "No, Ned; on second thoughts that plan will not do. For taking the men unprepared in this way, a score of them may hold on to the hope of getting treasure in Guiana, and so rally round the captain. Then we may have to throw them overboard as well as the captain, which will be a great loss to us. For we can make no great success with small means, and it will never do to start short-handed. Besides this," says he, "the men pressed into our service by the fear of death will never serve us as willing hands would."

"Why, that is true," says Parsons, who clearly did not relish the idea of his own scheme being acted upon contrariwise. "You always had a better head for these matters than any of us. So let us hear how you would act."

"In this wise," said Rodrigues. "As soon as we set sail from here—you on the one ship and I on t'other—we will secretly show the dullards the folly of seeking wealth in Guiana, when they can enrich themselves tenfold without leaving the ship, or encountering any of the hazards and hardships of going a-foot through those fearful wilds. And first will I win over Pengilly,

who is ripe for this enterprise. When I am sure of him, Sir Harry will be got rid of, and then will Pengilly take his place as commander, being nephew to Sir Bartlemy, whose ships these are. So without the loss of one man we shall have gained our way, and all willingly will obey his directions."

"So far so good," says Parsons; "but how is this to advance us? Are we to take for our share no more than what he chooses to give us as his officers?"

To this question Rodrigues made no reply. And this silence perplexing me, I cast my eyes sidelong to see if they had moved away. And then I perceived what it was had stopped his tongue.

The moon had shifted during their conversation (of which a great deal for the sake of brevity I have not set down), and whereas at the beginning it had shone full on my face, it now struck me somewhat on my left side. So that there down on the deck I spied my shadow revealed beside the great mast, and Rodrigues had spied it also. For before I could turn my head, I felt his long bony fingers upon my throat, and then the flash of his dagger in the moonlight caught my eye.

CHAPTER VI.

I AM NEARLY UNDONE BY MY SHADOW.—NED PARSONS AND RODRIGUES, THEIR ARGUMENT, WITH THE COMPACT THAT FOLLOWED.

Now, I had not stirred a hair's breadth the whole time this Rodrigues and Ned Parsons were discussing their affairs; and thus I was standing, with my back against the great mast and my feet a couple of spans away from it, when Rodrigues takes me by the throat, flashing his steel before my eyes, as I have said, and, at the same time, Parsons, slipping his foot betwixt my legs and the mast, fetches me a trip which brings me plump down on my back. Then, in a twinkling he throws himself upon me, and had certainly done my business with his jack-knife (both having lugged out upon catching sight of my shadow), but that Rodrigues, catching his arm back, cries—

"Hold, Ned! Don't you see that this is none but our friend Benet Pengilly?"

"I see well enough who it is," answers Parsons; "but he is a spy for all that, and shall pay for stealing on us. Let go my arm, Rodrigues!"

But this Rodrigues would not, being just as quick to fore-see results as Parsons was to lose sight of them.

"Don't be a fool, Ned!" said he. "How could he have stolen on us, and we sitting with our eyes on the cabin? He was here from the first, and I do not blame him for picking up what we were careless to let fall. And what harm in that? He has but learnt what we intended to tell him. Would you ruin everything by spilling his blood, when his loss would draw suspicion on our heads, and set all our mates against us with mistrust? Had it been another he should have died, and I would not have left the business to you neither; but the moment I got my hand on his throat I saw it was our friend."

"That may be," says Parsons; "but, curse me! he shall give me some better assurance that he intends to stand by us in this matter ere I let him rise."

"Nay," says I, "you shall get nothing from me by force"; and, getting my hands under him, I flung him off like an old cloak, and sprang to my feet. "Now," says I, "what is it you want of me?"

All this passed as quick as the words will run, so that the whole business was not more than a minute or so in the doing.

"Well done, Pengilly!" cries Rodrigues. "I like you the better for this taste of your manhood. I never mistrusted a brave man yet, and here's a proof of it now," and with that he sticks his dagger in the deck, and seats himself on the chest, with empty hands, bidding Parsons, as he was a true man and not a born fool, to do the like, which he presently did, sticking his jack-knife in the deck, and sitting alongside of Rodrigues; and to show I feared neither, I seated myself betwixt them.

"Now, Ben," said Rodrigues, clapping me on the knee cheerfully; "what's it to be? You have heard our design. Do you stay in the Canaries, or go with us to the South Sea?"

"What to do?" I ask for this question did still perplex me.

"What to do? Why, to get gold, to be sure."

"I thought you had decided not to set foot ashore," said I.

"And so we have; for what Englishman has ever got gold that went out of his ship to get it? The fools have thrown more gold into Guiana than ever they have taken out of it, a hundredfold."

"Ay! And gold is not the only thing they have thrown away," says Parsons, "but many a good and honest Englishman's life as well."

"For every man that has come home," says Rodrigues, "a hundred have been left behind—slain by Indians, stung by serpents, dead of fevers, or slaves to the Spaniard."

"And them as do come home are none the better for having gone thither," chimes in t'other rascal, "as we do testify; for here am I short of one eye, and Rodrigues a sight to see."

"That there is gold in Guiana no one can doubt," says Rodrigues; "but the only men who can get it are the Indians, and their only masters are the Spaniards and Portugals."

"Then where did you get the treasure you brought to England?" I asked.

"Why, from the Spaniard, to be sure, and as fairly as he got it from the Indian."

"Ay! and fairer," says Parsons; "for we got it by straightforward and honest fighting."

"And if we were more lively in our attack," puts in Rodrigues, "'twas because their galleons were unwieldy with their weight of gold."

"I count we do 'em a service to ease them of their load," says Parsons, "for they have more than they can carry with comfort" (this with a laugh at his own joke).

"Ay! but our love doesn't end there; for, look you, Ben, which is the better—to let your uncle's ships and treasure be cast away in the Orinoco, to lead fourscore men to misery and death in those fearful winds, or to carry them back home, every man rich for life? To suffer the Spaniard to carry that gold into Spain for the encouragement of Papistry and devilish cruelty, and the furnishing out another Armada, or to take it away from them for the benefit of our country and the honor and glory of our king?"

And in this manner they carried on the argument a long while, one playing the part of marrowbone to the other's cleaver, while I sat in silence and lost in wonder, like one who should of a sudden see a strange new sun rise up in the sky. At length I found the sense to speak, and, say I—

"But how can we attack the Spaniard when we are at peace with Spain?"

"Why," says Rodrigues, "peace there may be in these waters, for that matter; but there is no peace below the line, as every one does know."

"Nay," says I, "'tis nothing but piracy you offer."

"You may call it what you like," says he, "but I think it no shame for any man to walk in the shoes of Drake and Candish."

"'Tis a hanging matter, for all that," says I, still objecting.

"A hanging matter for those who fail to take home gold, but a knighting matter for those who do, as witness Sir Francis and others less nice than he. But 'tis the same all the world over, whether a man undertake to find gold or to cure bunions. Raleigh gets his head cut off for failing, and Master Winter is made a peer. And quite right it be so, for it puts a check on men from hazarding foolishly, and encourages them to push their fortunes with zeal, when the chance is on their side."

"And this is the long and short of it," says Parsons, bluntly, for argument was not to his taste. "Are you with us, or are you not?"

"I am with you," says I, and upon that we joined hands—all three.

And in thus readily falling in with this villainous proposal I was moved, not so much by Rodrigues, or his subtle arguments, as by my own fierce and lawless spirit, and a certain brutal craving and lust of blood and treasure, which Lord forgive us, urges too many of us to cruel pursuits, no whit more justifiable in the eye of God than piracy.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PERPLEXITY OF BEING NEITHER THOROUGH-FACED ROGUE, ARRANT FOOL, NOR HONEST MAN.

We stayed at Fuerteventura nine days, and then made sail, being again in good condition and nothing lacking, and shaped our course for the West Indies. And as Parsons had foreseen, Rodrigues was appointed captain of the *Adventurer*, while Parsons took the place of master on board the *Sure Hawk*. This pleased the *Adventurer's* company vastly, for all looked upon Rodrigues with open admiration, backed up by secret hope; and, indeed, there was no man more proper for this post.

No sooner had we quitted our anchorage than we began, Parsons and I, to work upon the minds of those foolish fellows who had to be prepared for that change we intended to bring about. So now Parsons, instead of painting the glories and delights of Guiana, as he had done with a very free hand, when inducing them to leave their fishing villages and join our ships, did treat all such glories with derision, telling them they were like all to get a good deal more than they expected, and thrusting his tongue in his cheek with a wink of his one eye at me for all to see. Whereupon these fellows did begin to scratch their heads and think they had been hoodwinked, and led into a business which had been better left alone. And from that he went on to tell of all the horrible beasts and worms there existed in the marshes of those parts; the poisonous fruits in the forests, all so like the wholesome that one never knew whether his meal was to give him strength or burst him open by its venomous swelling; of the cannibals, whose shoulders grew higher than their heads, and whose arms were two fathoms long; and such-like wild stories. If any one doubted the truth of what he said, he would appeal to one of those men who had previously voyaged with Rodrigues, and these, seeing which way the cat jumped, confirmed him in every lie, no matter how outrageous. Then he came gradually to talk of Hawkins and Morgan, and fellows of that kidney, exalting them to the skies—in fine, we carried this business so well that by the time we arrived at Trinidad there was not one man aboard the *Sure Hawk* but that heartily wished to rove the South Sea for gold rather than to seek it in Guiana; yet, for all that, a good half of the crew were stanch and faithful to our captain, and prepared to die with him in the wilds; nor would they listen to anything in his disfavor, or any project of desertion. And the reason of this was that Sir Harry Smidmore, being of a lively and sanguine temperament, and having unbounded faith in the success of his enterprise, had ever a cheerful and kind word for his men, and neglected not to comfort the company in every possible way, so that he won all the hearts to him that had any decent feeling. Indeed, as the fresh sea air purged away my splenetic humor, and the society of sturdy men inspired me with a wholesome shame of those contemptible humors which were bred by solitude, I no longer harbored an envious jealousy toward Sir Harry, perceiving plainly how far above mine were his claims to the love of Lady Biddy Fane. Feeling thus with regard to him, I could neither wish to do him a mischief myself, nor to see him come to harm by other hands. Yet every day it became more obvious that a cruel end awaited him. There was no chance of his forsaking the expedition into Guiana to become a pirate on the high seas, and it was therefore clear that he must be privately got rid of to avoid a mutiny amongst these thirty or forty good men who were stanch to him.

I own I was greatly perplexed over this matter, and more than once I was on the point of revealing the conspiracy to him; for I felt that, if he were murdered, I should, in a manner, have his blood upon my conscience; but as many times was I deterred from this confession by recalling my oath to Rodrigues, and by a certain sense of honor which may exist even amongst such rogues as we were. And so I was terribly put to it all the time we lay at Punto de Gallo, revictualing and making the final preparations for going up the Orinoco.

We lay off Punto de Gallo three days, and the men of both ships mingling, Ned Parsons and Rodrigues found occasion to lay their heads together pretty frequently; and this boded me no good, for Parsons had ever kept a jealous and suspicious watch upon my movements, and must have perceived my growing love for our captain. On the evening of the third day, we three being ashore together, and come to a spot free from observation, Rodrigues says:

"If this breeze holds, we are likely to sail to-morrow; and as we may not get another chance of conversing privily, let us settle what's to be done, and how we are to do it when we are aboard."

"Ay, we've had enough shill-I-shall-I," says Parsons, in his surly tone.

"We should have been further off from success if we had gone a shorter way to work, Ned," said Rodrigues, "as you know well enough, though you won't own to it. If we had followed your advice and thrown the captain overboard when we left the Canaries, half the men would have been against us, and looked upon the first storm that came as a judgment upon us. It's no good setting men to a task before they're prepared for it. Now there's not a man aboard the *Adventurer* who is not thirsting to get at the Spaniard."

"You've had them all to yourself; but it's another matter aboard the *Sure Hawk*," says Parsons; "there's a score of half-hearted fellows amongst us that were better at home."

"That's as you think, Ned. What say you, Pengilly?"

"The men's hearts are as stout as ours," says I; "and as ready to meet the Spaniard as any of your crew. I'll answer for them."

"Perhaps you'll answering for their flinging the captain overboard when the time comes?" says Parsons, with a sneer.

"I'll answer for you, Parsons, if there's a cowardly murder to be done; but for no one on board the *Sure Hawk*," says I. "I warn you, Rodrigues, that if you attempt the life of Sir Harry, you'll have a score of us to settle with, him and Benet Pengilly among the number."

"There, didn't I tell you as much?" says Parsons, nudging Rodrigues.

Rodrigues frowned on him to be still, and turning to me, says, calmly—

"What do you mean by that, Pengilly?"

"I mean this: our captain shall not be murdered," says I.

"And how can you prevent it, pray?" asks Parsons.

"There'll be plenty of time to warn him before you can silence me, Parsons."

"Didn't he swear secrecy by the cross, Rodrigues?"

"Yes, I did," says I; "but I'll break my oath rather than have murder on my conscience!"

"Conscience! How long have you been troubled with that commodity?" asks he.

"Fool! you be still," cries Rodrigues, stamping his foot. "Haven't you sense enough to see that Pengilly's warning saves us from the very thing that I have dreaded all through? I know the mischief of having discontented men in a crew."

"Settle it how you will," says Parsons with an oath, getting up and turning his back on us. "Curse this dodging backwards and forwards, say I!"

"If the captain were out of the way, and you took his place, as lawful representative of your uncle, the men would do your bidding, wouldn't they, Benet?" said Rodrigues in a friendly tone.

"No doubt," says I; "but I will not have any hand in this business if violence is to be done to Sir Harry."

"Then what do you propose we should do?" asks he.

"He lies ashore to-night: why shouldn't we sail without him?"

"That's better than ever!" cries Parsons, turning round. "Leave him here to send a king's ship after us. A plaguey good notion, that," and he burst out into a horse-laugh.

"That won't do, Ben," says Rodrigues; "as Ned says, we should have a man-of-war sent after us, and so have to fight English as well as Spaniards. I think I can offer something better than that"; and drawing me aside that Parsons might not hear, he dropped his voice and said: "Supposing, when we are out at sea, we tell the captain our determination to go roving, and ask him to join us?"

"He will refuse: that's certain."

"Very well; then let us give him one of the ships and let him go with as many of the men as choose to join him. What say you to that?"

I agreed to this readily; for it seemed a better way out of the mess than any I had imagined.

"Good," says he; "so shall it be. Now, leave me alone with Parsons. He is a self-willed, headstrong fellow; but I know how to manage him, and I promise you I will make him hear reason."

So I left them, never dreaming but that Rodrigues, for his own interest, was dealing fairly in this business, and speaking his mind honestly.

That night our captain brought aboard an Indian Cazique named Putijma for our pilot. This man told us that the true mouth of the Oronoque and the best for us to enter was in the Boca de Nairos, and about thirty leagues south of Punto de Gallo; and thither it was agreed, the breeze remaining prosperous, we should sail the next day.

When this news was imparted to our company there was a great cheer, and every man set to with a will getting the ship ready that she might sail at daybreak; and the sky being very fair and clear they worked all night to this end, and there was such bustle of men coming on board, shouting of orders, and getting things in their places, that no sleep was to be got.

A little before daybreak I turned out of my cot, and, going on deck, found that some were already aloft shaking out the sails, while others were heaving up the anchor, and all singing of sea songs, and as merry as any grigs. Ere yet the sun had risen our sails filled; we left our anchorage, and, looking out, I spied the *Adventurer*, her sails spread, following pretty close in our wake. Then, the light growing amain, I perceived one strange face amongst our company, and then another, and after that a third and fourth, and so on, till I numbered a full dozen; yet these men were not so strange to me but that I recognized them as being part of the crew of the *Adventurer*. Upon this, suspecting mischief, I cast my eye about for those men whom I have spoken of as being stanch and loyal to our captain, and not one of these could I find. In this I saw clearly the villainy of that subtle Rodrigues, who, by thus shifting the crew, ensured his plan against opposition, for not one man now on board the *Sure*

Hawk could be counted on to side with the captain in going to Guiana, whereas all would readily agree to ridding themselves of him in order that they might follow their own lawless bent uninterrupted; meanwhile, by his own persuasion and the influence of the rascally crew on the *Adventurer*, those simple fellows from the *Sure Hawk* who still held to an honest course could be easily won over to his purpose. To make sure that the change on board was not due to accident, I sought out Ned Parsons; but the rascal, seeing me coming, feigned to be mightily busy, so that I could not get a word out of him in any way, which served to convince me of his treachery. Getting no satisfaction from him, I went into my cabin, and there, sitting on my cot, I turned the matter over in my mind, and, after looking at it this way and that, I resolved I would go and warn Sir Harry of his danger; for, as I told Rodrigues, I was prepared to break any number of oaths rather than be a party to a foul murder. And, lest I should be credited with more generosity in coming to this decision than I deserve, I will here confess that I was not unmindful of my own peril. For, if it served the purpose of these desperadoes to throw our captain overboard, why should they spare me? I laid no faith whatever in the promises of Rodrigues; nay, I was inclined to believe Ned Parsons the honestest rogue of the two. I knew that all he considered was how to advance his own fortune. Had the crew been more difficult to seduce and less disposed to become pirates, then it would have served his turn to carry out his original project, and give the enterprise a fair face by appointing me, as nephew of Sir Bartlemy Pengilly, their generalissimo; but now that it was clear the whole body of men needed no such countenance to their project, it would be expedient to get rid of me as well as Sir Harry. So to the captain, who still lay in the cabin, I went, and asked him if he knew of the change that had been made.

"Ay, Pengilly," says he cheerfully; "I ordered it so. Parsons tells me there is a lawless spirit spreading amongst the men on the *Adventurer*, and he picked out certain of them as being the worst. These Rodrigues begged me to take with us in the *Sure Hawk* in exchange for those he thought might bring the rest to a healthier way of thinking on the *Adventurer*."

"That villain, Rodrigues!" I exclaimed. "I saw his devilish hand in this. We are lost!"

"Lost? What do you mean by that?" asks Sir Harry, bating his breath.

"I mean that you have parted with the only honest men in the crew, and have none but ruffians left about you."

"Nay, you wrong them. Desperate they are, for who but desperate men would dare a desperate enterprise? But they are honest—I'll answer for 'em. They have sworn to follow me, and they will."

"You will be lucky to get away without such followers," says I; "but, in truth, I doubt if we do ever set foot again on dry land."

Sir Harry could not speak awhile for astonishment. At length he says, speaking low:

"Are you sure of this you tell me, Pengilly? Are you honest with me?"

"I'll say nothing for my honesty," says I; "but I'll swear to the truth to what I tell you. There's not a man but is already a pirate at heart; and they only want a signal from Rodrigues to kill us and hoist the bloody flag."

Sir Harry started up, and took a pace or two across the cabin; then, coming to a stand, he turns and says:

"No, Pengilly; I can't believe this. Tell me you have tried to fool me, and I'll forgive you."

"Nay, but you must believe," says I, "or you can not escape else"; and then I laid bare all that I knew, with my own share in the villainous scheme, not sparing myself the shame of this confession. He listened to me patiently, but when I came to an end he says, with passion:

"God forgive you, Pengilly! for my ruin is on your head."

But presently growing calmer, for I made no attempt to defend myself from this charge, he adds:

"Take no heed of what I said, Benet. You have done no more nor less than I, or a better man than I, could have done in your place. You risk your life in trying to save mine, whereas you might have made your fortune (though I doubt if you could ever have enjoyed it) by betraying me."

"He held out his hand, and I took it. Then in a more cheerfull and vigorous tone, he says:

"Come, we are both in the same pickle; let us see how, perchance, we may get out of it."

Then we set our wits to work that we might discover how we two were to overcome the craft and force of all those hardy villains that was against us. I was for knocking Parsons on the head, taking the navigation in our own hands, running the ship ashore, or on the first shoal we came to; and I think Sir Harry would have acted on this design, but that it pleased Providence to give us no chance that way.

CHAPTER VIII.

WE ARE OVERCOME, AND WITH BARBAROUS TREATMENT SET ASHORE AND LEFT THERE.

Of a truth none are so suspicious as those who should be suspected, and losing sight of this fact was our undoing.

To begin with 'twas a silly thing to go into the captain's cabin at that time; it was still more imprudent to sit there with him discussing our means of escape. For it happened that Ned Parsons, seeing me no longer inquisitive about the shifting of the crews, became curious to know what had become of me, and presently sighted me sitting, as I say, with Sir Harry. Doubtless Rodrigues, in his place, would have taken some crafty means of discovering our design and circumventing it; but this Parsons was of another kidney, and prone to reflect upon the advisability of his actions after they were performed rather than before. Wherefore, at the first sniff of danger, he goes below, collects a dozen choice rogues, and having gone into the armory and furnished themselves with weapons, they slipped on deck, and in a twinkling rushed into the roundhouse and fell upon us. We were the less prepared for this attack because the fellows, having no shoes to their feet, came on noiselessly along the deck; and indeed, from the moment we first spied them to the time they were in the coach, there was barely time for Sir Harry to catch up a short sword for his defence, and I a spyglass that lay on the table. Sir Harry ran the first of the party through the vitals, and I managed to lay Ned Parsons' head open with the spyglass; but we could do no more, for we were thrown down by sheer force of weight and numbers, and after that our bootless struggles did not prolong by a few minutes the work of binding us hand and foot. From these bonds there was no escaping; Ned Parsons himself, with the blood yet trickling down his face and grizzled beard, making fast each knot and testing its security. When this was done, he went out to the main deck and spoke to the men crowded there, and they replied with a great cheer, and so betook themselves to their work, shouting and talking among themselves with much content. But to make more sure of us, and that all might see we were not contriving our escape, this Ned Parsons hauled us out of the roundhouse into the midst of the deck, and there we lay in the burning sun all day, and none had the humanity to give us meat or drink, though they for the most part made themselves as drunk as beggars by midday. Nay, when Sir Harry, who had been as kind to these wretches as any man could be, asked one to give him a cup of water, the villain would not, but replied, with a brutal laugh, that he should have more water than he could drink at sundown, by which cruel speech we perceived that our fate was sealed, and that they only awaited the occasion of Rodrigues' coming on board to cast us into the sea.

The breeze continuing very fresh, we pressed onward; but towards evening the wind abated, as it does in these latitudes about sundown, the sails flapped against the mast, and the anchor was dropped.

Soon after this Rodrigues came aboard, and first he consulted with Parsons, who had contrived to keep more sober than the rest; then they held a council with all the men in the fore part of the ship, after which Rodrigues comes to us, with his hat in his hand, as civil as may be, and with a wicked smile on his face that showed all his pointed teeth, so that with his hypocritical air he did look more like a fiend than a man.

"Gentlemen," says he, "I am sorry to tell you we must part. The men, one and all, have resolved to seek their fortunes elsewhere than in Guiana, and lest their design should be distasteful to you and lead to any further breaking of heads or spitting with steel, they would have me, as being now chief in command, drop you overboard with a shot tied round your necks. I have done my best to alter their disposition, but the most they will consent to in your favor is that you shall be allowed to go your way in consideration of your giving them free permission to go theirs, with a solemn promise on your part that you will hereafter do nothing, if you have the chance, to bring us to the gallows."

"Do with us what you will," answers Sir Harry.

"Ay, and be cursed for the villain you are," adds I.

"As you do not refuse the offer it is my duty to make, I shall hold it you accept," says Rodrigues, taking no notice of me; "betwixt gentlemen no formalities are needed. It is understood that in accepting your life you agree to the conditions, and this understanding will be as binding on you to do us no harm—if, as I say, you get the chance—as though you had put hand and seal to a bond."

Then making us a bow, he went back to the men, who, on hearing what he had to say, gave another cheer, and some set about lowering Sir Harry's own barge, while others went below and fetched up all manner of stores to put in it. All being in readiness, we were taken to the side of the ship, bound as we were, and with a rope reeved through a block at the yard-arm, we were hauled up and lowered like cattle into the barge that lay alongside. For the first time we perceived that the land was distant no more than half a mile or so. After us the Indian Cazique Putijma, whom, as I have said, Sir Harry had brought abroad at Punto de Gallo for a pilot, was made to come down in the barge, and then half a dozen seamen in that boat that had brought Rodrigues from the *Adventurer* towed us with a line to the shore, the crew giving us a jeer as we sheered off, and Rodrigues (with a bow) wishing we might have a pleasant journey to Manoa, and find a kind reception and store of gold there.

Having brought us to land and made our barge fast, the boat's crew, with somewhat more humanity than their fellows, bade us good-bye and god-speed, and then pulled off quickly back towards their ship, for there was no moon that night, and it was now grown so dark that we could but just descry the two ships lying off in the bay.

All this time Putijma, who was unbound, had sat in the barge with his knees up to his chin in profound silence; for such is the stoic character of these Indians when overcome by misfortune from which they see no escape. But now Sir Harry, who spoke Spanish, addressed him in that tongue, begging him to cut our cords, and this he did; but it was yet some minutes ere either of us could move, so benumbed and stiff were we with our long confinement. When I got the use of my limbs and hands, I drew a dram of liquor from the puncheon among our stores, and gave it to Sir Harry, who was thereby much refreshed. Then did we get out of the boat to exercise our legs, and finding the sand still warm and pleasant with the sun's heat, we lay ourselves down to sleep, there being no better thing to do. But first I got from the boat a couple of muskets, with powder and ball, and two hatchets, that we might not be unprovided against the attack of wild beasts or cannibals in the night if any such there might come upon us.

But Putijma never stirred out of the boat, nor could Sir Harry any way cheer him out of his despondent mood; and the last I saw of him he was still sitting with his knees huddled up to his chin, and so we presently fell asleep.

We slept soundly, and nothing disturbed our slumber all through that night. The sun was some degrees above the horizon when I awoke, and a smart breeze ruffling the sea. Sitting up I looked out for the ships, but they were no longer in the bay; yet methought I spied one sail on the horizon to the south. Then I got upon my feet and looked for the barge and the Indian Cazique, but trace or sign of either could I see none. I rubbed my eyes and looked again; then I ran a hundred yards along the shore eastward, and again as far to the west; for I could not at once realize that this man was treacherous to us. But 'twas all in vain; he was nowhere to be seen. So I roused up Sir Harry, telling him how the Indian had played us false and gone away with the boat, which was our only means of getting back to Trinidad, and like distracted creatures we ran along the shore a mile one way and a mile the other, hallooing aloud, as trying to cheat ourselves with the hope of that Putijma had slipped away by accident, and drifted into some creek. But at length we gave up the quest, and stood gazing before us as still and silent as statues of stone, quite overwhelmed by this last stroke of misfortune.

And thus were we two poor men abandoned on an unknown coast. I say we two poor men, for now were we leveled to the same degree by a cruel fate, being possessed of no more than a gun and a hatchet apiece besides the clothes we stood in, and with the same dismal expectation of perishing unfriended in a wilderness.

CHAPTER IX.

WE FIND OURSELVES ON A DESERT ISLAND, AND LITTLE COMFORT BESIDES.

After a while we returned to the place where we lay during the night; and, looking about us, found that the cruel Cazique had taken away the keg of powder, the puncheon of rum, ay, the very bread we had brought for our refreshment on landing; thus robbing us of our present subsistence and the means of procuring other.

Seeing this, Sir Harry threw himself on the sand and sobbed out aloud; for as yet he had suffered never any hardship or disappointment. But it was otherwise with me, for many a time had I endured privation and known no hope. Yet did it move my heart to see a strong man, and one naturally light of heart, gay, and of high spirit, so abased; so I sat down beside him, and, laying my hand on his shoulder, spoke such comforting words as my tongue, unused to such exercise, could command. And this may seem strange, seeing that hitherto I had borne him no love, but rather jealousy and hatred. But you shall notice that misfortune doth engender kindness in hearts the least susceptible, so that a man who would jostle another and show no manner of kindness and civility, both being strong, would yet bend down and gently succor him who fell across his path from weakness; for our sympathy is with those weaker than ourselves, and not with those of equal hardness; and this, I take it, is the reason of the great love of strong men for weak women, and the wondrous tenderness of women for those cast down by sickness.

Sir Harry would not be comforted; but shaking my hand from his shoulder he cries:

"'Tis easy to bear the misfortunes of other people!"

"Nay," says I, "am I better off than you?"

"Ay," says he, "for you have but changed one form of misery for another. These woods for you are as good as those you left in Cornwall. Your prospects here as good as they were there. But !! what have I not lost by this change! All my fortune was embarked in those ships; and with them I lose every hope—fame and riches—my sweetheart. All! all! What now have I?"

"The hope of getting away from this place; the hope that—that she may wait faithfully your return."

"And what if, by a miracle, I get from here, can I hope to recover my fortune? I must go a beggar back to England; nay, a debtor for the ships of Sir Bartlemy that I have lost. And think you if my sweetheart in pity would make me her husband, I would be her pensioner, dependent on her bounty for the bread I eat?"

To me this seemed an overstraining of sentiment; for I would have been content to take that dear girl for my wife, rich or poor; nay, I could not believe that any sense of dependence or bounty could exist in the union of two who love entirely. But I would not contrary him by speaking of this, which he would but have set down to want of decent pride and self-respect on my side.

"There is no hope—no hope!" he continues, bitterly. "I am undone by my enemies, and you are one of them—a man I have sought only to help—a base wretch who would not speak a word to save me from my undoing."

I held my peace, as I had before, when he spoke after this sort. For partly I felt that I deserved reproach, and partly I saw that he was beside himself with despair. So I let him be that he might vent freely all his passion. But he said no more; and for some while he lay there like one who cared not to move again. Then getting upon his feet savagely, as though ashamed of his weakness, he says:

"Let us go from this cursed spot." Then, looking about him in bewilderment, "Where shall we go?"

Be a man never so wretched he must eat and drink; so I told him we must first of all seek a stream to quench our thirst; and the land to the west looking most promising, I settled to explore in that direction; Sir Harry being indifferent so that we got away from this unlucky place where we had been set ashore. We took up our axes and muskets—which the thieving Cazique had left to us because they lay under our hands, as I may say, and he feared to awake us—and marched onwards, keeping to the sand, which was very level and firm, the tide being at low ebb. We kept on this way for best part of a league, and then the shore becoming soft with a kind of black mud, we were forced to seek higher ground; and here our progress was made very painful and slow by reason of the scrubby growth, which was mighty thick and prickly, so that we were torn at every step. To add to our discomfort, the sun, being now high, shone with prodigious heat upon us, and parched us with thirst. There were woods at hand, but here the thorny bush was so high and closely interwoven that we had to use our hatchets to make any way at all, and then were we no better off, but worse; wherefore we were obliged to return to that part where the earth was less encumbered. Some of these brambles had thorns two inches long, and curved like great claws; and one of these tearing my leg gave me much torment. As the sun rose higher, so our suffering increased, until, after marching best part of two hours, we were ready to drop with fatigue. Fruit there was in abundance, spread out temptingly under our feet; for nearly every bush bore some sort of apples or grapes; yet dared we not eat any for fear of its being venomous. Of this venomous fruit I had heard the seamen who had traveled in these parts tell, and how a man eating of it will presently go raving mad; and I pointed out to Sir Harry, who would fain have slaked his thirst with this growth, that we had as yet seen neither bird nor beast, which argued that this food was not wholesome.

However, about midday, when we were as near spent as any living man could be, we came to a turn in the coast where the character of the growth changed; and here we found a great herb with leaves spreading out on all sides; but every leaf was a good twenty feet long and half a fathom across, so that it gave us ample shade to lie in; and never was man more content than I to get out of the sunshine. To our still greater comfort, Sir Harry presently spied at no great distance a low-growing thicket, in the midst of which grew a fruit that he knew for a pine-nut, which is a fruit bigger than any that grows in England, of a yellow complexion, and scaly without, but of excellent condition within. Cutting it in half with his knife, he gave me one part, and bade me eat it without fear; and this I did, though not without compunction, but I found it truly as he said, both meat and drink, and the most delicious ever man did eat, with no ill effects after.

We rested ourselves some while, and then being much refreshed continued our journey over very fair ground, but yet keeping very near the water; and so rounding a headland, and facing pretty nearly due west, we perceived another headland across the water, but at a great distance, which led us to conceive that we were upon one of the mouths of the Oronoque, which, as we know, disembogues itself by many issues into the sea over a length of a hundred leagues and more along the coast of Guiana. And that this was a river, and not an inlet of the sea, we proved by tasting of the water, which was still running out very troubled; it was not salt and bitter, and yet too thick and brackish to drink. And now the trees approached the water-side, some hanging over, with thick growth everywhere; and though I know English trees well, and the different sorts of herbs, yet all here were new to me, and I saw none that I could name. For prodigious height and girth I never saw the like of the trees, which were besides wondrous fair to the eye, but painful to get through by reason of their great abundance, and the maze of vines and bramble (as I must call them, knowing not their names) which netted them together. Surely to one come there for pleasure and to satisfy his curiosity, there was on all sides something to please and interest, there being no end to the variety of flowers and fruits, their colors and forms; but to us, who were mainly concerned to discover where we were situated, we did wish best part of these trees and shrubs further.

We made our way onward for two hours more, yet the land on the other side of the river appeared no nearer, for the rivers in these parts have no parallel for volume; and then we came (God be praised) to a small stream running from the interior, which we found at some little distance inward to be very sweet and good, so that we drank of it our fill. But what pleased me as much as the discovery of this water was the print of a cloven foot in a slough, hard by, which I judged, by the form and size, to be the foot of a swine; and so it proved, for going still further, but with caution, along the edge of this marshy land, we perceived a whole drove of this cattle stretched out in the warm mire, grunting from time to time as pleasantly as any English hogs. Seeing them thus within range, Sir Harry, ere I could check him, cocked his piece and let fly; and though he killed one dead on the spot, yet was I sorry he had spent his fire on this quarry, for I believe I might have knocked one on the head and done for him with a blow of my hatchet; and now were we left with only one charge of powder and ball to meet any emergency.

We dragged this beast, which was a boar pig of some ten score, as I reckoned, away from the morass, which I dreaded to stay in for fear of serpents or other noxious beasts; and finding a place near the river high and dry, we resolved to stay there the night, for the day was nearly spent, as were we likewise. Here Sir Harry set about to get some dry fuel and make a fire, the while I skinned our pig, and a marvelous thick hide he had; and so much the better was I pleased, for I saw that with this hide cut in thongs I could make us a good gin to entrap other swine when we had occasion for them, also a sling for killing birds, and other things necessary to us in our forlorn, destitute condition. Sir Harry got some dry rotten wood, and grinding a little to powder he set it in the pan of his firelock, and snapping the cock twice or thrice succeeded in setting it burning; then blowing the ember gently on other rotten wood, and that on dry leaves and such-like, he in the end got a flame to put to his bonfire, and over this on pointed sticks we held some slices cut from our swine's ham; enough not only for our supper, but to serve us cold on the morrow; and well it was we did so then, for the next morning the carcase I had hung on a tree overnight was all green and so foul we were fain to cast it in the river to be washed away with the current; but that which we had cooked was sweet and good, though mighty tough eating.

But I must tell of the strange way in which we were awakened that morning, which was by the crowing of a cock, and surely nothing in this land so full of unlooked-for things could be more unexpected than this familiar, homely cry. We two started up together at the sound, rubbing our eyes to be sure we were in a strange country and not at home in England. But again this bird crowed, and casting our eyes about, there we spied a fine red cock perched in the boughs of a tree with three pullets on one side of him and two on the other, all as comfortable as you please, and not yet astir, for the day was scarce broke. Upon this we concluded that there must be human habitation near, and overjoyed at the hope of seeing fellow-creatures in a land where we had thought to be all alone, we started to our feet and halloosed with all our might, not reckoning that the fellow-creatures might be cruel Indians who might murder us, and mayhap eat us afterwards for our pains.

However, though we halloosed till we were hoarse and could halloa no longer, answer came there none, except a clucking of the fowls, who seemed to be at a loss what we were crowing so loud about. Yet from the presence of these fowls and the swine—which seemed to us not natural inhabitants of these parts, we clung to the idea that some sort of fellow-creatures were near, and so with a more cheerful heart than I, for one, had yet felt since we were put ashore, we continued our march when we had eaten and drunk to our satisfaction. But first we took of the thongs I had cut from the swine's hide and stretched to dry between two stakes, one apiece to serve as belts in which to sling our hatchets, another which I had fashioned for a sling, and two or three besides to serve for what occasion might arise. The rest we left behind us, marking well the spot. Our ham steaks were covered up in cool leaves to keep them fresh, and hung them also to the thongs about our middle.

That night we came to a point projecting into the midst of a vast expanse of water, and seeming to cut the river into two, for we found that there were, as I may say, two currents—one running to the southeast, and the other northeast—so that we

concluded we were not on the mainland at all, but upon an island in one of the great mouths of the Orinoco. This was made evident as we proceeded, for still marching with the water on our left hand, our faces were turned to the east, and not to the west as at first; and, in short, on the third day of our march we came again to the ocean, and about midday on the fourth to the very spot from which we had started.

In all this time we had seen no human creature, nor had we met—thank God!—with any serious accident, though inconveniences not a few; and not the least of these was a multitude of flies and stinging gnats, especially upwards away from the sea, which were a great plague to us, and especially to Sir Harry, who had the more tender skin, and was tormented to that degree that he could get no peace night or day for the intolerable itching and smarting of their punctures. Nor did we meet any great beast, save a huge water-lizard that is called a cocodrill, which lies in the waters of these rivers and looks like nothing on earth but a log of timber at a distance. Birds there were in plenty, and with my sling I brought down enough for use, and more; and to speak of all the fruits here were a waste of time. Suffice to say that we lacked nothing to satisfy our appetite, and came to no harm by what we ate of strange things, for we were careful to eat of no fruit or herb but such as we found the swine and other animals feasted upon.

CHAPTER X.

I QUIT THE ISLAND AND MY FRIEND.

And now, being come back to our starting-place, we had to consider our position and what we were next to be at.

I say we, but in truth I might say I had to consider these things, for Sir Harry seemed to have neither care for the present nor hope for the future, and do what I might to bring him to a more cheerful complexion, it was all to no purpose.

"What is there to do in this cursed island," says he, "but to eat and drink and sleep till we die?"

"The more reason," says I, "for devising some means of getting away from this isle to where we may do better."

He stretched out his hands towards the sea that laid void before us, and laughed bitterly.

"Nay," says I, not to seem discouraged, though, indeed, my hopes were but slight; "it is not so impossible as you think. Take it that the day we left Trinidad the gale was in our favor, we could but have made twenty or thirty leagues at the utmost. Now say that the river to the north is three leagues broad, we may yet, by taking the current at our highest point, contrive to make our way across on some kind of raft, using a bough for paddle. There is nothing lacking to make us a raft."

"Well," says he, "say by good hap you cross the river and get on another isle—what then?"

"Then," says I, "will we make our way to the north of that island and cross to a third, or a fourth, after the same fashion, and so get on till we come to that part of Guiana due east of Trinidad, whence may we with no more difficulty cross the strait."

"Suppose, after all," says he, "that we get to Trinidad—what then? Shall we be better off there than we are here? We run a fair chance of being captured for slaves by the Portugals, to be sure."

"Also," says I, "run a fair chance of escaping them and being picked up by some English ship putting in as ours did to revictual."

"Allowing that your fondest hopes be realized," says he, "is our case mended? Is it worse to sleep away our lives here than to be taken into England as a raree show for men to laugh at and women to pity? No," says he, with more passion than he had yet shown; "no, I say! It is not better, but a hundred times worse, and I for one will never go back to be scorned for a silly fellow who could not hold his own."

It was not for me to reproach him, for had I not also abandoned myself under adversity? I was convinced, and so I am now, that a despair is a malady of mind as much as is ague a distemper of the body; and though men say one should not give way to despair, but should overcome it by an effort of will, yet, I say, that if the will be attacked by a great shock and enfeebled by misfortune, it is powerless to exercise its function. For such as suffer from this disease of the mind there is no help from within, but its only succor is from without. Wherefore, the kindly ministrations of a friend will do as much to restore health in this case as the help of a doctor in any other. For this reason I bore patiently with Sir Harry in his morose and sullen humors, and sought all I could to divert his spirit from brooding over misfortunes not to be undone. But I think all that I did in this way produced me more good than it did him; for whereas he continued despondent and dull, I grew more cheerful and humane. I waited upon him like a servant, and this service, with my pity to see a young, fine man so cast down, engendered a feeling of love in my breast such as I had never before felt for any man. Nay, I even looked to getting with him back to England, and seeing him married to Lady Biddy Fane, without any feeling of jealousy, being not only more gentle of heart, but more reasonable of mind.

At this time we stayed on high ground to the south of our territory, over against that part where we first found the pine-nut; not only because of the shade we got there from the sun, but by reason that it was adjacent to the stream of good water, and not far from the fen where the swine came to wallow, and where there was abundance of fowl and fruit good to eat.

While we were here, Sir Harry fell sick of a fever, bred partly, as I think, from his low, desponding spirit, and partly from the vapors that rose from the marshy valley below. When I found he could no longer sit upright and began to wander in his speech, I took him on my back, and, by stages of a dozen yards, carried him away from that unwholesome spot right down to the sea-shore, and there, finding an easy slope, I laid him down, and, as speedily as I could, set about making a kind of house to shield him from the sun. The night being fairly light, by dint of many journeys to and fro and much toil, I planted a dozen stakes in the sand, bending them down till they joined at the top, in the form of a great "A", and binding them to a cross tree, then I thatched this framework with those long and broad palmetto leaves of which I have spoken. Here he lay as comfortable as might be for one in his burning condition, the sea breeze passing through the shelter and tempering the heat of the sun.

He could eat nothing; however I made shift to stew a fowl in the shell of a gourd, and when the broth was cold I got him to drink it, for he had a perpetual thirst; and that his drink might be cool and refreshing, I went a score of times during the day almost to the source of the stream, where the water was of the best. Of such fruits as were good also I gave him, particularly the apples from a low, square-boughed tree with egg-shaped leaves, which is called, I believe, guava.

And now I prayed to God that this man's life might be spared, and that I might not be left alone, which more than all proves the great and good change which had been wrought in my heart since the time when I sought but to escape from the society of mankind, and wished harm to all men, and this one above all.

At the end of seven days' very painful watching, Sir Harry's disorder took a turn, and soon after he began to mend (thanks be to God!) so that he could take meat instead of slops to his diet. Yet was he greatly changed, his skin having lost its freshness and healthful color, and his face much wasted. Also he was very weak, and for days lay exhausted and unable to move, yet with his eyes wide open and very bright. After a while I persuaded him to rise in the cool of the morning and evening, and then would he take a turn, leaning on my arm. And though he said nothing, I perceived he recognized the love I bore for him, and was grateful for my care. What pleased me vastly was to perceive that a change had been wrought in his spirit; it seemed as though his sluggish indifference had been purged away. When the fever had quite left him, his eyes continued bright and eager, and there was in his face an eager expression, telling of an anxiety which only exists where there is hope. But what his hope was he told me not. This encouraged me to believe that he designed leaving the island (where there was, as I could see, naught to hope for), and not dying there, as he had at first resigned himself to. I again began to meditate on the means of reaching Trinidad, but I refrained from opening the subject yet awhile, because he was still too feeble to undertake the fatigue of it.

One day, when I had returned to the hut by the shore from the inner parts, where I had been planting a snare to catch a pig, I found Sir Harry absent; but soon after I heard him shouting, and, turning my eyes, I spied him running towards me along the sand with something in his hand, which, as he came nearer, I perceived was the stave of a barrel.

"Look at that," says he, with much emotion; "there have been men on this island before us. Up in the wood there is a broken barrel; this is a stave of it. Men brought it here."

"Why, for a certainty," says I, "this wood never sprang out of the earth fashioned thus?"

"No," says he, "nor did the pigs on this island spring out of the earth."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked, perplexed by this observation.

"I mean," says he, "that the men who came here to fetch water in that barrel left the swine and the fowls to multiply against the time they should come here to revictual. I thought as much as I lay there in my sickness hearing the cock crow, and now I have the proof. Do you doubt it, man—do you doubt it?"

"Not a whit," says I; "and I wonder I have not drawn the conclusion before, for I remember now how Rodrigues told me it was the habit of pirates, who fight shy of towns, to provide for themselves in this wise."

"Then you think," says he eagerly, "that they are pirates who came hither?"

"Ay, and not honest men; that is my fear," says I.

"And I trust they be pirates, and not honest men, if they are to come here again," says he; "for then may I get back all I have lost, and more to boot."

"As how?" says I, not without trouble in my mind.

"By the same means my fortune was taken from me—by strategy and force."

"Surely you would not become a pirate—you, a gentleman of birth and breeding?"

"And what was Drake but a gentleman?" says he; "and Candish: what of him?"

I shook my head, and heaved a sigh to hear this argument from the lips of my friend, which I had listened to from such a rascal as Rodrigues.

"Why," says he, in a rallying tone, "you were not so squeamish aboard the *Sure Hawk*."

"No," says I; "but I thank the Lord I have not taken his warning in vain."

He laughed scornfully, as though thinking my peril had made me prayerful, and caressing the barrel stave with his hand, lifted his head and scanned the sea, as already expecting the return of those pirates we talked of.

"And is your fortune all you expect to get by becoming a pirate?" I asked, laying my hand on his arm.

"What more do I want, forsooth?" asks he lightly.

"Why, sir," says I, "the peace of mind to enjoy it."

"As for that," says he, "however I get it I warrant it shall bring me more enjoyment than I can expect stopping here, or going back to England a beggar."

"Are you so daunted by the outset that you despair of getting gold honestly in Guiana?"

"Hum!" says he; "I cannot see that it is much more honest to take gold from the Ingas of Manoa, who have never done us harm, than from the Spaniard, who has sought to undo us with his flotilla; but, be that as it may, you will show me how we are to get to Manoa, who are not yet beyond the mouth of the Oronoque, ere I give that enterprise the preference."

"Single-handed we can do nothing, but I will answer for it that my uncle, Sir Bartlemy, instead of being discouraged by our first failure, will be more inclined to persevere in it. You know his nature as well as I do. A reverse does but strengthen his determination, as a bite infuriates a bulldog."

"That is true," says he; "he is an Englishman to the very marrow of his bones."

"Well, then," says I, "shall he not fit you out another expedition?"

"Why, man, how can he? Nearly all he had was united to my fortune in buying the two ships I have lost and in equipping them. He is a ruined man. Ruined by me!"

"If he lacks money, other shall be found. He will move heaven and earth to save you from the disgrace of sinking to the level of such wretches as Morgan and Sawkins, and this Rodrigues."

In this sort I argued with him persistently, till at length, seeing that I was not to be shaken off by argument, he turns about and says:

"Look you, Pengilly, I will never go begging in England, even for a second chance to be cast away on this island. I can not easily consent that another should beg for me; for a craven I must appear in either cases. But since your mind is set on this thing, go you to England without me; and if any, for my sake, will make this venture, lead them hither; then, if I be still here and alive, I will attempt this expedition to Manoa. Nay," he adds, interrupting me, when I began to protest that I would not quit him; "leave me here and go about this business as you will, you shall still be the more generous of the two; for I swear to you that if the worst pirate that sails the seas comes here I will cast in my lot with him, whether you accompany me, or whether you refuse to take part with us."

Seeing him very stubborn and resolved upon this point, I then began to think seriously of getting away as best I could; for, thinks I, 'twere more humane to leave him here alone, with the chance of bringing him succor and the means of honestly escaping from his solitude, than to rest here inactive until perchance there comes some villainous sea-rover with whom he shall take his departure. For my own part I had no leaning to piracy; for, though I love the Spaniard no more than any other true Englishman may, yet I knew full well that Rodrigues and such fellows would not question closely whether their prey was Spanish, but would pillage and sink any craft that sailed so that it had not the strength to resist attack.

So, going along the border of that upper stream, which in my ignorance I will call North River. I came upon a great tree that was dead and decayed about the roots, so that it needed but little cutting to make it fall, and that close to the water. This tree was fully three fathoms in girth, and proportionately tall, straight, and fair, decayed only where the humors of the earth had attacked its base, light and very proper in all ways to my use. Wherefore I set to work, and, cutting on that side I wished it to fall, I felled it with no very great difficulty. When it was down I found the upper part sound, as I expected, and not so hard but that with patient labor I succeeded in cutting two lengths each of five fathoms long. These two lengths I set side by side, the thicker end of one against the thinner end of the other; then I got a quantity of those long vines which the Indians call lianas, which are very stringy and tough as good, hemp rope and with this I bound my timbers together in a hundred places, but separately, so that if by chance one broke the rest would still hold. But I must tell you that for the greater convenience of working these huge logs I launched them separately into a shallow before I began to bind them about, which was well, for I could never have moved them else. After that I sought out two slight trees of hard growth that were not more than thirty feet high, and cutting them down, I trimmed them into two poles, each four fathoms long. Then, midway in the length of my logs I made two holes—one in each, and parallel one with the other. To do this I jagged the mouth of my musket barrel about, grinding each jag into a sharp tooth with a hard stone, by which contrivance I made a tool to serve in place of an augur. When I had pierced the logs right through I enlarged the holes by making my musket-barrel red hot in a fire, and working it about in the holes. Into these sockets I fitted my two poles, using every device I could think of to make them firm and secure; and this being done, and both poles standing bolt upright, I turned the logs on their side so as to get the ends of the poles within reach, and these ends I bent until they met, and so bound them together with lianas to make them bite still closer in their closets, and also to be a support one to the other against the gale, for they were to serve me as a mast. For, by the time my logs were cut, launched, and bound together, as I have shown, I had come to the conclusion that it would be better to venture the whole voyage by water, keeping as near as might be to the main, and taking advantage of favorable breezes, rather than to abandon my raft on the other side of the river and make my way onward by land to that point nearest Trinidad, as I had first meditated on, for I knew not what other great rivers there might be to cross, nor how many rafts I might have to make ere I got to my journey's end; and the difficulty of making such a raft, rude as it was, no one can conceive but those who have had a like difficulty to contend with. It cost me four months and ten days of painful labor to achieve that which I have set down.

During this time Sir Harry had not been idle; and though he could not honestly encourage me with a hope of bringing my business to a happy issue, yet he helped me with a willing heart, and said nothing which might discourage me neither. But he was as firmly fixed in his intent as I on mine, and rarely worked up the river with me, lest in his absence the ship he expected might come and go away again. Anything he could do within sight of the sea he did, and this was no trifle. Here every day he provided food for our necessity, and in his spare time he fashioned me a long yard for my mast, and, which was more, he made a shoulder-of-mutton sail—to rig on my mast like a lateen on a zebec—of long reeds very ingeniously woven together. Also he devised two vessels to contain fresh water for my use by stripping a couple of hogs from the neck downward without cutting the skin. These skins he turned inside out, scraped off all the fat carefully, and then steeping them in the sea until they were cured, and afterward washing them some days in the stream of fresh water, they were found good and sound, each holding a good hogshhead of water.

Besides this, he cut a vast quantity of pork steaks and cured them in the sun, which may be done without corrupting the flesh if it be laid where the sun is hot and the air dry. Moreover, he saved all the bladders of hogs that he killed, blew them out, and coated them over with a sort of pitch to preserve them from the attacks of flies and insects. This pitch comes from the sea of those parts, and is washed ashore by the tide, and being melted before a fire, it is as good a pitch as any in the world. These bladders I tied on to the extremities of long poles lashed crosswise to my raft to serve as a sort of buoys to bear up that side to which the sail inclined, and prevent the raft from capsizing in a sudden squall.

I bound some bundles of these transversely to the logs to serve me as a deck, and many other provisions I made, such as a great stone at the end of a line for an anchor, a paddle to serve as a rudder, etc. In fine—not to weary the reader with tedious descriptions—just ten months to a day from the time we were set ashore all was made ready for my departure.

And now, taking Sir Harry's hands in mine and pressing them close, I begged him to come with me.

"Look you," says I, "this offer is not unpremeditated on my part. All through I have borne it in mind, and for that reason have I measured my boat and all things to serve two rather than one. Here is provision for both and to spare; the breeze is favorable, and all things promise a prosperous outcome. Do, then, be persuaded by me, dear friend, to share my fate; if not for your sake and mine, then for those who love you in England and are eagerly hoping for your return."

He was not unmoved by this address, and the tears sprang in his eyes as he wrung my hand in silence; but he shook his head the while.

"No," says he, presently; "no, Pengilly; you know not the pride of my heart. It would kill me with shame to show myself a beggar there," turning his eyes toward the north. "I am a ruined man—ay, ruined body and soul—for I feel that I am unworthy of your love. Go!"

"Nay," says I, "let me stay that my persuasion may work on you. I left my offer to the last, hoping—"

"I know," says he, interrupting me. "You hoped that the prospect of being left alone, coming to be reviewed suddenly, would shake my resolution. But I have foreseen this. I saw that you were preparing for two to make voyage on the raft. I knew that you were not dwelling cheerfully day by day on the prospect of escape, but to excite a desire in me to escape with you. I know what is in your heart, and have just sensibility enough left in mine to value it. But I will not go. I am resolved, and naught can shake my resolution from its centre. Go; and may God bless you."

So with a very sad heart I was fain to accept his decision; and shoving out into the stream I went down swiftly with the current, and had not the courage to look back for that poor lonely man I was leaving behind.

CHAPTER XI.

I AM EXCELLENTLY SERVED BY MY FAMOUS INVENTION, AND COME TO ENGLAND NOT MUCH THE WORSE FOR IT.

By making vigorous employment of my paddle, first on one side and then on the other, I continued to keep well in the midst of the river, and the tide then ebbing fast, I was quickly swept across the shallows at the mouth, and so out to sea.

And now I thought it proper to hoist my sail; so, laying aside my paddle, I drew up the lateen between my two masts till it was taut, and then making fast the liana found it acted well enough, for at once it filled out very full and fair to the breeze, which was blowing pretty brisk from the southeast.

But now my difficulties and troubles began, for I had no experience in the governing of a sailing boat, and ere I had got to work at my paddle, my raft veered round before the gale, the sail flapping to and fro between the masts, and I had all the pain in the world to get her head round and my sail full again. And when this was achieved, I found a fresh fault, and this was that my buoys were nothing near sufficient to resist the pressure of the sail, so that they dipped deep into the water, the poles to which they were fastened bending to such a degree that I expected nothing less every moment but that they would snap under the strain, and the raft capsize utterly, to my final undoing. Wherefore I was fain to abandon my paddle, and reef the lower part of the sail to lessen the pressure, in which time I again lost the wind, so back to my paddle and more labor to bring me round once more before the breeze.

By this time I perceived that the current of the sea and my bungling together had swept me far from the coast, and rather to the south than to the north. And to my great perplexity I found that I could not get the wind in my sail without drifting still further from the shore to the west, for if I steered to the north, then would the wind go out of my sail, and the craft, losing way would drift with the current to the south, so that if I did nothing matters could be no worse. At last I was constrained to lower my sail altogether and seek to make head against the current by vigorous use of my paddle, first on one side and then on the other, as I say, And, lord! no man could be more encompassed with troubles than I was, or sweat more to overcome them than I did at this time. At length, from sheer exhaustion, I was fain to give over, and let my raft, without sail or oar, go whither it might. I set me down on my deck of rushes, and casting my eyes toward the land was dismayed to find it but an indistinct line on the horizon (I have been out to sea now four hours or more), and to the best of my belief I stood further from Trinidad, after all my trouble than ere I started forth. And let this be a warning to all men that they put not to sea ere they have learned to sail.

When I had refreshed myself with some water and one of my dried pork steaks (which, that they might not be perished by the sea water, I had hanged conveniently high on one of my masts), I rose up, and with a kind of desperate fury essayed again to make a proper course. First, I went at my sail once more, and when I found that of no avail but rather the contrary, I seized my paddle, and worked at it like any galley slave, and though I could see no improvement, yet did I persevere diligently. Then, fancying the breeze was a little abated and blew from another quarter, I went (with a prayer) and once more lifted my sail, but that would not do, and so (with a curse) I dropped it and back to my paddle. In fine, to cut a long story short, I wasted my pains all that day, and had the mortification as I sat down once more to rest my aching limbs, to find the land no longer in sight; nor anything else but the water all around me.

Seeing it was useless to work when I could no longer see for want of light (though not more useless than before, may be), I lay me down on my reeds (the sea, God be praised! having subsided when the wind dropped to an agreeable calm), and presently fell asleep.

The next day there was no need to experiment with my sail, for not a breath of air stirred; so I worked steadily at my paddle pretty nearly the whole day, but I was forced to desist in the noon for some time because of the great heat of the sun, and that while I sheltered myself under the sail, which was, God knows, all the use it ever served me. All that day I heard not a sound but such as I made with my paddles, and the sea was like so much glass extended about me, and a mist all around the horizon caused by the sun sucking up with his great heat the vapors from the water. When the sun set, this mist settled over the whole sea, so that I could see never a star to cheer me, and this made me very sad and prayerful, for it seemed as if a death-pall were being spread over my unhappy being. Then would I gladly have been back with Sir Harry on the island; and thinking of him and our miserable estate, both alone, and like to perish without ever again hearing the sound of a cheerful voice, the tears began to flow from my eyes as from a woman's; and I do think I fell asleep weeping.

About midnight (as I reckon) I was awakened by the freshening of the breeze; yet nothing could I see. I groped my way along very carefully to my masts, that I might have them to hold by, for already the sea was rising; and it was well that I did so, for in an amazingly short space of time the breeze quickened to a gale, and beat the waters so high that I was like to have been swept away by the waves as they burst. I will not dwell on the increasing terrors of that night, for no words can describe the fury of that hurricane, or my dread lest the binding of my logs should be rent asunder and my frail resting-place part under me. And here let me observe that, no matter how a man may desire death at other times, yet in the hour of peril will he ever cling desperately to life.

When morning broke, my case was no better than in the night; and looking around me at the billows that threatened every moment to engulf me, I was appalled, and could but say, over and over again, "God be merciful to me!" For a long while I experienced neither hunger nor thirst but only great fear and terror; but when nature began to crave within me, and I looked to see if I could get at my water vessels, I perceived that they had been washed away in the night, for I had taken no precaution to lash them to the raft for safety. And also I noticed that my deck of rushes was clean gone and my outriggers broken. My only comfort was that the bonds of my raft still, for the most part held good, though the straining of the timbers had loosened them, and it was clear they could support the rubbing of the logs and the wrenching of them but a little longer. I saw that if one or two at the end went, then all must go; therefore, as I crouched between the masts I watched these bonds as a man may watch the preparing of a gallows from which he is in the end to be swung off into eternity. And after my raft had been shot down into a great hollow, and thence rising up, met the fearful buffet of another huge wave, I saw that the end liana was burst asunder. "God be merciful to me!" says I again, and with the greater earnestness that I felt I might the next moment be in his presence.

At this moment, above the bustle and rush of the waves and wind, I heard a report like the firing of a small piece of ordnance, and, casting my eye in that direction, I saw, to my great amazement, a great ship bearing down upon me, and not two fathoms off. And that noise I heard was made by the splitting of her topmast and its striking the side of the vessel as it fell. Scarce had I seen this when the ship, riding down on the wave, ground its foreside against the end of my raft, and the next instant I found myself entangled in the wreck of the broken mast with its yard, which still hung to the ship by its cordage. Some of this cordage passing right athwart me, I sprang up and clasped it; then, though as how I can not tell, but as I best might, I climbed like any monkey upwards, getting no more than a dozen or so good thumps against the ship's side, and knocking the skin off my knuckles, by the way, until I got my head above the bulwarks, where already two stout seamen were severing the wreck from the cordage with hatchets. When these two saw me rise as it were out of the grave over the bulwarks, I say, they were stricken with greater terror than the fury of the tempest had inspired, and fell back from their business with gaping mouths and starting eyes; but as I tumbled over the side and threw myself on the deck, they perceived I was no ghost, but only a poor shipwrecked wretch, they picked me up and bore me into the roundhouse to their captain, for I had no power even to stand, being quite spent with my exertion and trouble of mind.

The captain spoke to me, but I could not understand him, for, as I afterwards found, he was from Holland and spoke Dutch, and I spoke to him with no better effect, for he knew no word of English. Nor did any man on that ship speak anything but Dutch, or understand our tongue. I tried to make him comprehend by signs that I ventured to sea on two logs, but he could make nothing of me till we got to Schiedam (which we did, thanks be to God, in a little over eight weeks), where was a man who spoke English.

The captain was very humane and kind to me, and for my serving him on the voyage, which I did to the best of my ability and cheerfully, he paid me at the same rate he paid his other seamen, besides giving me a decent suit of clothes, of which I stood much in need. Through this good man's generosity was I enabled to pay my passage in a galliot to Yarmouth in England, where, by the good help of Providence, I arrived full safe and sound.

And there had I yet some pieces to spare for my sustenance and to help me onward to Falmouth.

CHAPTER XII.

LADY BIDDY GIVES ME A WORD OF COMFORT.

I reached Fane Court eighteen months, as near as may be, from the time our first unhappy expedition set out.

When I asked for Sir Bartlemy, the hall servant, seeing me all dusty with travel and out at the heel, told me I must bide my time, as the knight and Lady Biddy Fane were at dinner.

"No matter for that," says I; "tell him his nephew, Benet Pengilly, is here, and I warrant you will fare better than if you kept him waiting for the news."

The fellow started in amaze hearing my name, which was better known to him than my face, and went without a word to carry the tidings of my return to Sir Bartlemy. Almost immediately, afterwards my uncle came out into the hall, and as quickly after him Lady Biddy—Sir Bartlemy as hale and hearty as ever, and Lady Biddy, to my eyes, more beautiful than before; but both pale and greatly amazed in countenance.

"Benet!" gasps the old knight, and that was all he could say. But he held out his hand, which I took and pressed with great love, for my feelings were much softened by hardship, and I was grieved to think of the pain I was to give him instead of the joyful news he looked for. Lady Biddy stepped forward, and her face lighting up with hope, she looked for the moment as if she also might be kind to me, and welcome me for the sake of her lover. But of a sudden she checked herself, seeing my downcast complexion, and bating her breath, she says:

"Where is he? Where are the rest?"

Then says I, with as much courage as I could muster, but with pain that went to my heart—

"I am the only man who has come back." And with that I hung my head, not to see their grief.

"He is not dead—they are not all lost!" I heard her say, in a tone that seemed mingled with, a silent prayer to merciful God.

"No," says I; "Sir Harry is not dead. I left him out there in Guiana; but for the rest, if they be lost, 'tis their just reward."

Then Lady Biddy burst into tears to know that her lover lived, and Sir Bartlemy, taking her by the arm and me by mine, led us into the dining-hall without speaking.

By this time, Lady Biddy's emotion being passed, and her pride returning, she took her arm from her uncle's, as if she would not accept of kindness that was equally bestowed on such as I.

"Sit ye down there, Benet," says my uncle, pushing me to a seat; "and now tell us all as briefly as you may; for I perceive that the case is bad (with a plague to it!) though Harry live (God be thanked!); and if there be a tooth to come out, the quicker it's done the better."

Then I told the bare truth: how Rodrigues and Ned Parsons had led the crew astray and set us ashore, and the means of my coming again to England, in as few words as I could shift with. When I had made an end of this, Lady Biddy was the first to speak.

"Why did not Sir Harry come back with you?" says she.

"He scorns to come back a beggar," says I. "He will never return to England until he can repay his obligations to Sir Bartlemy and ask you to be his wife."

This gave her great joy, admiring in him that quality of pride which she cherished in herself, so that her eyes sparkled again, and her fair bosom swelled with a sigh of satisfaction. Presently she turned again upon me, her pretty lips curved with disdain, and says she:

"And you left him there in that desert alone! Content to save your own life, you abandoned him to hopeless solitude. Oh, that I had been a man in your place!"

I hung my head again in silence, feeling it were better to bear her reproach than to attempt an excuse; for I could not trust my tongue to reveal the main reason of my escaping, for fear I should betray his intention of turning pirate; and this, for the love I bore them, I was resolved to keep secret.

"Nay," says Sir Bartlemy, coming to my help, but with no great enthusiasm neither; "never beat the dog that comes home." He paused, and I could fancy his adding to himself, "Curse him, for a mean-spirited hound, all the same!" Then he continues, in a more hopeful tone, "If he had not come home, how could we have known of Harry's peril? Come, Benet; tell me that in coming hither you hoped to get succor for Harry."

"You might believe that," says I, "of a man with less heart than you credit me withal. I came to beg for help because Sir Harry was too proud to beg it himself."

"I knew as much," says he, taking my hand and shaking it heartily. Then turning to my Lady Biddy, "And now, my dear, what's to do? I have no money, and an expense I must be to you all the days that I live, now that my all is lost, with a pox to those rascals that robbed me! But you of your plenty will charter a ship to go out and fetch this poor man?"

"More than that must be done," says I. "He will only accept such help as will enable him to recover all he has lost."

There was approval in Lady Biddy's looks when I said this.

"Odds my life! he's in the right of it," cries Sir Bartlemy, bumping the table with his fist. "Plague take me if ever I'd come sneaking home with my tail twixt my legs like a whipped cur that has neither the stomach to bite nor to keep away from his sop. I mean nothing ill with regard to you, Benet," he adds, turning about to me, "for I hold you have done the part of a true friend and a good, and have shown more courage and high spirit in this matter than many another. Well, what's to do, girl, eh?"—turning now to Lady Biddy, and rubbing his thighs with his broad hands cheerily.

Lady Biddy, with not less eagerness in her manner, looked to me, and nodded that I should speak all that was in my mind.

"As much must be found as has been lost," says I. "For nothing less in men or treasure will suffice Sir Harry to reach Manoa. And with that it is a venture, and naught can be done without God's good help, for never man saw a country so difficult to penetrate or such currents of rivers to mount. And first, money must be raised."

"Money shall not lack. I will venture my fortune to the last piece," says Lady Biddy.

"Ay, and so would I, if I had aught to lose," cried Sir Bartlemy. "But you, my girl, may well spare enough for this venture, and yet have as much to lay by for another, if that fail."

"No time must be lost," says I.

"Not a moment," cries Lady Biddy, starting up as if she had but to fetch money from her strong chest to accomplish all. "You must see about ships and men at once, uncle."

"Ay," says he, "but who is to command them, and carry help to your sweetheart in Guiana?"

Lady Biddy looked at him, and he at her, wetting his lips, as one with a dainty dish set before him that he would fain eat of.

"I'm an old fellow, but there's life in me yet: there's vigor—there's manhood," says he; "and if I decay 'twill be only for want of use. And I know the seas as well as any man, and I warrant me no crew of mine should take my ship from me, as from this poor lad, who put too great faith in the honesty of seamen. I dream o' nights of ocean seas; and feather-beds I do hate more than any man can—"

"Then why should not you command this expedition?" says Lady Biddy.

He tried to look astonished at this design; then putting his beard betwixt his fingers and thumb, and shaking his head doubtfully, he tried to look grave, but his merry eye twinkled with delight at this notion. Yet presently his chap fell, and he looked truly serious.

"My dear," said he, "what am I to do with you? I can not leave a young girl alone in this place, and you have no relative but me, nor any steadfast friend to whom I may confide you, and a scurvy to it. Lord! I'd have done it, but for this plaguy obstacle."

Then Lady Biddy, as mad as he and as fond, cries:

"Do you think I will be left at home to mope, as I have in these past months? Nay—where my fortune goes, there go I also."

"And why not?" cries my uncle, banging the table again. "Was there ere a better governor than Queen Bess, and she was a woman? And no queen that ever lived had a higher spirit or a braver heart than thou, my dear! Kiss me, for I love you. Now go fetch the chart from my closet. Benet" (turning to me), "you shall go with me and be my counsel (as much as you may, being but a poor sailor, I take it). We'll set to this at once; ships must be bought and men got—honest men—and none of your rascals who have come home with gold, and tell of getting it from the Ingas." In this way he ran on, till Lady Biddy came in bringing the chart; and a very good chart it was, so that I had no difficulty in pointing out the island where we had been set ashore, as I have said.

Then did this uncle and niece lay out their plans gleefully as any children designing a holiday jaunt—reckoning nothing of the perils and terrors that I knew lay before us. But this sanguine temper was of that family's nature. And beautiful it was to see that graceful, lovely girl leaning over beside the old knight, following the course he laid down on the card—her face all aglow with eager hope and love, her eyes sparkling, and her rich, ruddy lips sweetly curved in a smile about her little white teeth.

I know not how it came about—whether it was the pang which shot through my heart as I reflected that this adorable creature was for another and not for me—that for his sake was she hazarding her fortune and life, while, if she thought of me, it was but with scorn; or whether my body was exhausted by the fatigue it had endured in hastening hither and my long fast (I had walked all night and eaten nothing but scraps of cow-salad torn from the banks), I cannot say; only this I know that, while I sat there watching that sweet girl, a great sickness and faintness came upon me, so that I had to rise and go to the window for air.

Then Sir Bartlemy spying me, and how my face was white and the cold sweat standing in beads on my brow, perceived that I was sick. So he brought me a mug of ale and some meat, which was his remedy for all ills. But what did comfort more than

these victuals was the kindness that filled Lady Biddy's heart when she saw my case. No angel could have been more tender. And while this mood was yet upon her, she said in my ear:

"Benet, I did you wrong in my too great haste; for I see now that you have served him with great love, and I must love you for so loving him."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CROSSED HEART.

When two impetuous streams join and flow together, their course must needs be swift—whether to flow into the sweet and happy valley, or into the dark and horrid gulf. Thus while my uncle occupied himself in one matter, Lady Biddy busied herself in another, and both to the equipment of this new expedition; so that in an incredible short space of time all provision was achieved, and we were ready to set out.

First there were ships to be procured, and seamen to serve them. For better choice, Sir Bartlemy journeyed over to Portsmouth, taking me with him, and a well-stuffed purse, together with a dozen lusty servants for our safe escort through those lawless and dangerous parts which lay betwixt Truro and Exeter, where no man rides safe.

Being come without mishap to Portsmouth, Sir Bartlemy went to an old acquaintance of his, a broker and a very honest man, and with him we went and examined all those ships that were to sell, choosing in the end two that were after his heart; excellent fair ships too, sound and swift, that had sailed the seas, one two years and the other four; for Sir Bartlemy would have no new ships, but only such as had stood the test of tempest, and were fully seasoned.

While this was a-doing I made a discovery which gave me no little concern. The broker would have us look at a French ship, albeit Sir Bartlemy declared he would trust himself in no timbers that had not grown in England; however, to humor him, we went to the side of the harbor where she lay. But at the first sight of her my uncle turned up his nose, and began to find a hundred faults, finally declaring that nothing good ever came out of France save her wines, and that it would be time better spent to drink a pint of Bordeaux than to go further with the examination of such a cursed piece of shipbuilding. With that he invited the broker to crack a bottle in an adjacent tavern, which they did without further ado. But something in the look of this ship arousing my curiosity, I feigned to have no liking for wine, and getting the broker's leave to visit the ship, I hired a wherry and was carried to her.



La Belle Esperance was her name, and she was painted quite fresh in very lively colors, after the sort of French ships; but for all that when I got on board my suspicions were stronger than ever; for the make of the ship (being little altered) was, as I may say, familiar to me. And straight I went into the coach, and so to the little cabin on the larboard side, and there on a certain timber I sought and found this mark, cut deep in the wood:

Then I knew beyond doubt that this ship, despite its new name and fresh paint, was none other than the *Sure Hawk*. For this crossed heart was my cipher (making the letters B. P. after a fashion if looked at sidelong) which I had engraved with my own hand and of my own invention.

I needed no further proof, but, being greatly troubled, went straightway ashore. And there finding occasion to speak privately with the broker, I questioned him concerning this ship: how long she had lain at Portsmouth, etc.

"Why, sir," says he, very civilly, "she has been here three weeks, and no more. To tell you the truth, she was a French pirate, though I said nothing of that matter to Sir Bartlemy to add to his prejudice. But she is a good ship, and was taken by some honest Englishmen trading in spices."

"And what was the name of their ship who took this?" I asked.

"That I cannot tell you," he replies, "for their ship was so disabled in the fight that they had to abandon her and come home in this."

"Do you know these men or their captain?"

"No, sir, for they were of Hull; but I believe the captain's name was Adams, for I heard of him yesterday."

"In what respect?"

"It was in this wise. He bought a new ship of a brother broker here—the French vessel being not to his taste, nor big enough for his purpose—and sailed it hence to fit out and victual at Hull, where his crew would fain see their friends; and to Hull we thought he had gone. But my friend having necessity to go to St. Ives, in Cornwall, did there see this very ship, and Captain

Adams with his men ashore, all drunk as any fiddlers; which amazed him, so that he spoke of it as a thing not to be understood."

But I understood this well enough, and therefore I laid the whole matter before my uncle, and would have had him go with me to St. Ives, where I doubted not but we should find Captain Adams to be Rodrigues, and so lay him and his rascally crew by the heels, besides seizing his ship for our redress.

But my uncle would not agree to this.

"For," says he, "in the first place, it is a tedious business to stir the Admiralty to our profit, and in that time this Rodrigues—curse his bones!—may get wind of our intent and slip through our fingers; and, secondly, I hold it best not to stir up a sleeping dog, but to get on while one is safe. Added to which, every moment's delay is as much as a year of suffering to Harry."

To this I could make no objection, so I agreed to keep what I knew secret. But I perceived full well that my uncle, had he not openly expressed to his friend such contempt for the French ship (as he thought her) would have let Sir Harry wait until he had proved her to be the *Sure Hawk* and brought Rodrigues to justice, for he was very revengeful when roused, and full of hatred for the man who cheated him; but because he feared ridicule—having condemned that for worthless which but twelve months before he had bought for the best ship ever built—he would do nothing. For which weakness, God knows, he was fully punished in the end.

Our business being brought to an end at Portsmouth, we sailed our new ships into Falmouth Haven; and their names were the *Sea Lion* and the *Faithful Friend*. And here were piles of merchandise waiting to be shipped, for Lady Biddy Fane had faithfully bought and prepared every sort of thing in just proportion as before our going Sir Bartlemy had set down an inventory; and none but a capable woman of stout purpose and strong heart could have done so much.

To work went all to get this store aboard—the very house servants being pressed into service (such as they could compass), under the direction of Lady Biddy; yet could not all be done in a day, nor much less than three weeks, and no time lost.

All this time my mind was exceedingly uneasy, less Rodrigues should hear of our expedition, and seek to do us harm. And with this dread I made inquiries (privately) if during my absence any one had called to see me, and I found no one had asked for me. Then I felt sure that Rodrigues or Parsons and his men were at Penzance, and none others but they. For otherwise to a certainty the wives and sweethearts of those men drawn from Penny-come-quick and Truro to our first venture, hearing as they must of my return, would have sought me for tidings of them. And if they were in communication with those men, then must our enemies know that I had come back, and that another expedition was fitting out. I knew the nature of Rodrigues—subtile and daring wretch!—merciless in the pursuit of plunder, and bloody as those beasts of prey which will kill, though they be too surfeited to eat, their quarry.

At length all was ready for our departure. Lady Biddy having paid off all her servants (save a good wench whom she took with her) sent her plate and treasures to a silver-smith in Exeter; and so, to cut this matter short, put her estate in the hands of a trusty steward, and bade farewell to her friends. We all got on board: my uncle and Lady Biddy in the *Faithful Friend*, which was the larger and better ship of the two, and I in the *Sea Lion*. For though Sir Bartlemy would have had me with him, and Lady Biddy said nothing to discourage me therefrom, yet did I feel that it would be better that I should not see her, fearing her beauty might stir up the passion in my breast, and lead me again into evil thoughts.

It was arranged that the breeze proving prosperous the next morning we should depart at break of day; and license was given to the crew to make merry on board till ten o'clock, that they might start with a cheerful heart.

Now while the men were rejoicing after the fashion of mariners, there comes a wherry alongside with a woman in it; and this woman cries out to know if Jack Stone is aboard that ship or the *Faithful Friend*. There was no man of our crew with that name; but this woman being comely and buxom, with a merry face, the men did pretend that Jack Stone was aboard, but too drunk to stir; and with that they asked her to come up and give him a kiss for farewell.

"Why," says she, coming up the side without more ado, "do you start so soon? Jack told me yesterday you did not set out for a week."

"We sail at daybreak, sweetheart," says the gunner, taking her about the waist.

And this was what she had come to learn, as I feel convinced; for as soon as she had heard as much as was to be pumped out of these fuddled fellows, she left them, and was rowed ashore, never having again asked after the man she called Jack Stone.

The purser being a sober man, I asked him if he knew the woman, and he told me he knew her well for a Penzance woman.

"Then," thinks I, "Rodrigues has brought his ship round to be near us, and he has sent this woman for a spy. From Penzance she has come on this mission, and to Penzance she has returned; and so God help us."

CHAPTER XIV.

WE ARE DOGGED BY A BLACK SHIP, TO THE GREAT DISCOMFORT OF OUR COMPANIES.

We set sail at daybreak with a fair breeze, and if this had held on, then had we got safely on our way, escaping all danger from our enemy; but being only a land wind, such as frequently blows towards the sun at its rising, we found ourselves an hour after clearing Falmouth Haven in a little chopping gale, where we had much ado, by tacking this way and that, to make any progress at all, to our misfortune. While we were thus pottering to and fro, a sail appeared coming down the Channel, whereupon, my fears being that way disposed, I took into my head at once that this was Rodrigues' ship from Penzance, there having been ample time during the night for the wench who had come aboard to take him intelligence of our intent to sail. Then I begged Captain Wilkins, an excellent good man as ever lived, to let me have the ship's barge that I might go speak with my uncle; to which request he acceded instantly, and the barge being lowered and manned I was carried to the *Faithful Friend*. Here, taking my uncle aside, I laid out all that had happened the night before, and pointing to the sail bearing down towards us, I gave him my apprehensions, begging he would put back into Falmouth Haven while we yet might. But this would he not do.

"What!" says he, "put back because a sail is in sight! Why, at that rate might we never get out of Falmouth. Never yet did I put back, for I couet it the unluckiest thing a seaman may do; and in this case 'twere nothing short of folly and rank cowardice; for our foe, if foe he be, is but one, and we be two. You have done your duty, Benet, and therefore I do not scold you for doubting my mettle, your own being much softened no doubt by hardship and suffering, Lord help you! But go back at once to your ship, I prithee, and bid Master Wilkins look to his armament, be sober and prayerful, and hold himself ready to lay on to an enemy."

With this comfort I returned to the *Sea Lion*, and telling Captain Wilkins my fears and my uncle's decision, he lost no time in charging the guns and setting out muskets, swords, and brown bills ready to every hand. Likewise he mustered the crew when all had been prepared, and gave them out a very good prayer, at the same time bidding the men trust to their own defense as well as the mercy of Providence (should we be presently attacked) and give no quarter. To this address would Sir Bartlemy have added a hearty "amen" had he been present, for it was just after his own sturdy heart.

The strange sail bore down to within half a mile of us, being a swifter ship than either of ours, and making way where we could none, etc.; and then she held off on a tack and came no nearer. And though she showed no guns, yet could we see she was a powerful ship, and such as, for the value of her, would not venture abroad in these troublesome times without good arms.

About noon the breeze grew stronger and more steady, and so continued that by sundown we had made in all twelve sea leagues. All this time had the strange sail followed in our wake, standing off never much over half a mile. Then Captain Wilkins and all on board were convinced that this was an enemy seeking to injure us, and it seemed that Sir Bartlemy was equally of our way of thinking, for by means of his signals he bade us double our watch, keep our lamps well trimmed, and hold close to him. And this we did, no man taking off his clothes, but every one who lay down having his arms ready to his hand. For my own part I quitted not the deck all that night; nor could I take my eyes from the lights on board the *Faithful Friend* two minutes together for thinking of the dear girl who lay there, and whose life and honor were in our keeping.

We could see no lights in our track at all during the night, whereby we hoped that our enemy—as I may call her—seeing not ours, had fallen away in the darkness; but when day broke we perceived her still following us, and no further away than ever, so that we knew she had been guided by our lamps, and had lit none of her own. In short, not to weary the reader, as she had followed us that night and the day before, so she clung to our heels for four days and nights after. And now being off Portugal, Sir Bartlemy might have run into port; but this he would not do; for, firstly, the breeze continued all this time fairly prosperous; and, secondly, his bold and stubborn nature would not permit him to swerve from his course, or show fear of any one.

By this time our company began to murmur because they got no proper rest through constant watching, and because (though they feared no mortal enemy) they began to look upon this pursuing ship as a thing without substance—an unearthly sign of impending destruction, a device of the fiend—I know not what, for seamen are ever prodigiously superstitious and easily terrified by that which passes their comprehension; and it strengthened their dread that this ship was painted black from stern to stern. Indeed, to a mind reasonably free from superstition, there was something dreadful and terrific in this great black ship following us with so great perseverance, which put me in mind of some carrion bird with steadfast patience hovering slowly about wanderers beleaguered in a desert, with some forecast that in the end one must fall to become its easy prey.

These six nights did I get no rest; but only a little dog sleep in the day when my body yielded to the fatigue of watching, my mind being quite disordered with dreadful apprehensions; for well I knew that if by storm we got separated in the day, or by accident of fog or such like lost each other in the night, then would our enemy fall upon us one after the other, and vanish with us; which, though we fought like lions, might well arrive, seeing she was so much greater than either of us, and manned with a greater company, as I could descry through a perspective. My own life I valued not; my fear was all lest Lady Biddy should fall a prey into the wicked hands of that bloody, subtle Rodrigues. What could that dear, sweet creature do to resist? What fate would be hers, being at his mercy? These questions did provoke fearful answers in my anxious imagination, to my inexpressible torment.

At length, on the seventh day, we being then, as Captain Wilkins told me, off the coast of Morocco, and the wind falling to a calm, I took a boat and rowed to my uncle's ship. And when I got aboard I found the company there in not much better case than ours on the *Sea Lion*, for every man had a sullen and unhappy look on his face, and from time to time cast his eye towards the black ship that lay behind us, for all my uncle pacing the deck did rate them most soundly for not going quicker about the business he set them; swearing at them like a heathen Jew, so that one, not knowing his kind and generous heart, had thought him a very tyrant.

My first thought was of Lady Biddy, and casting my eye up and down the deck to see if her fair face and dainty figure were there, my limbs shook and my teeth chattered together with the intensity of my desire. But she was nowhere visible.

"Well, Benet, what the plague has brought you from your ship?" asks my uncle roughly, as he comes to my side. "What do you fear, that you are spying up and down, your cheeks pale, and your lips on a quiver?"

"Lady Biddy," says I, with a thickness in my voice, "is she well?"

"Ay, and if all on this ship were as stout of heart I should have more reason to be grateful," says he.

"Thank God she is well. May no mischance befall her!" says I in a low tone.

"And what mischance may befall her if we act like men in her defense?"

I cast my eyes towards the black ship, and then said I to my uncle:

"Rodrigues is there, I know."

"You shall lend me your spyglass, for I think you have seen him, to be so cock-sure."

"No, sir, I have not seen him; but I am sure he commands that ship. A painter is known by his workmanship."

"I know nothing of painting and such fiddle-faddle. Speak straight to the purpose, man," says my uncle with a curse.

"Well," says I, "no man but Rodrigues could devise such subtle, devilish means for our destruction."

"In this holding on yet holding off, I see nothing but the device of a fool or a coward, be he Rodrigues or another."

"He is neither a fool nor a coward," says I; "he values his ship and his men too high to attack us at a disadvantage. He knows, as well as you do, that this patient following, while it amuses his company and rests them, is fatiguing ours, and sapping the foundation of their courage."

"I warrant their courage will return to the dogs with the first shot that is fired."

"Then may it be too late; for, you may be sure of this, Rodrigues will not fire a ball until he is sure of our defeat," says I.

"Sure of our defeat! And pray when may that be?" asks he, firing up with disdain.

"When accident helps him either to fall in with his comrade Parsons, or by our getting sundered through some mishap. He has as many men on his ship (as you may plainly see) as we have in both our companies, and more. How are we to combat him singly?"

"Why, with God's help and our own good arms," says he sternly; but the moment after that he turned his eyes towards the black ship, measuring it; and his silence proclaimed that he could not overlook his peril. Presently, in a more subdued tone, he says, "Well, nephew, I doubt not you had some better intention than to damp my spirits in coming here, so if you would offer any advice, out with it, for the love of God, and I promise I will listen with as much patience and forbearance as I may command."

"Sir," says I, "you are making for the Canaries, and there, in all likelihood, is Parsons, awaiting the coming of his confederate, so that we are, as it were, going before the tiger into the lair of his mate." My uncle nodded acquiescence. "Now, if I might advise, I would have you alter your course, and make for the Windward Isles, and so down to Guiana. Then, if Rodrigues does also alter his course, I should draw upon him and seek so to disable him with a shot amidst his masts as he should be disabled from following us further."

"Now, indeed, do you talk good sense, and such as is after my heart," cries he joyfully. "This will I do at once; so go you back and bid Wilkins prepare to shape his course this way."

But seeing that I yet lingered, as loth to depart, he claps me on the shoulder and says, "What else would you have, Benet?"

"Why, sir," says I, "I would have you send another with your message, and suffer me to stay here in his place."

"Why, are you so weak-kneed as that?" says he. "Well, 'tis in the nature of mice to be timorous; but I looked for better stuff in a man of our family."

"Nay," says I; "if I feared Rodrigues I should not ask to stay here, for 'tis this ship he will attack, knowing, as he must, by our sailing, that our general and leader is here."

"Why, that is true," says he; and then he fell into a silence, and looked at me keenly to divine why I wished to stay there. After a little while, marking the hot blood in my face, and knowing it was to be near Lady Biddy that, I sought this change of ships, he put his hands on my shoulders, and says he very kindly, and with a little trembling of pity in his voice, "My poor Benet, the best thing you can do for her sake is to go back to your ship and stay not in this. Ay, and for your own sake it were better too. The enemy you have to overcome is the passion of your own breast, which is more capable to bring ruin to your soul and sorrow to our hearts than are the guns of Rodrigues to endanger our bodies. Go back, dear fellow."

And knowing how this passion had before, by its hopelessness, brought me into evil ways and despair of better, I accepted his guidance and went back to my ship, though with a sore heart.

And going back I saw my lady standing in the stern gallery of the *Faithful Friend*. But she did not see me, or, seeing me, made no sign; for why should she trouble to descry whether it were I or another sitting there? And clasping my hands together I prayed God (within myself) to dispose of her to her own happiness and His praise.

CHAPTER XV.

WE FALL INTO SORE DISASTERS OF RAGING TEMPEST AND BLOODY BATTLE.

As soon as I was got on board I told Captain Wilkins of our generalissimo's intention, which he heard with much satisfaction, and did straightway communicate with his crew, who thereupon set up a great cheer. About two o'clock, the breeze freshening, the *Faithful Friend* changed her course and we with her, and for two hours we ran west, though the wind had been more prosperous for making south. Yet did the black ship follow us in the course persistently as in the other, keeping always the same distance in our wake. Then did Sir Bartlemy signal us to open all our ports for the guns to play, and to stand every man to his post, which we did very cheerfully and as smartly as ever the company on the *Faithful Friend* did. And though this preparation might well be seen from the black ship, we could see with our perspectives no such preparation on her, so that the simple would have conceived she had no lower ports for guns, and was an unarmed trader. Then Sir Bartlemy signaled us to stand-to, yet to be in readiness to come to his help if need arose, which we did; meanwhile he puts about and sails down on the black ship, who kept her ports closed, but stayed his coming patiently.

Being come within speaking distance, Sir Bartlemy takes his speaking horn and spreads out his ancient; whereupon the black ship spread hers, which was true English, and every way as good as ours. Then our general through his horn demanded what ship that was and why she did so persistently dog us. To this a man from the black ship replied, that she was the *Robin Goodfellow*, of Southampton, commanded by Richard Simons, and a very peaceable trader, bound for Campeachy Bay to barter for dye-wood, and that she meant us no harm, but only sought to have protection against pirates by sailing in the company of two ships so well armed as we.

"Then," shouts my uncle, "be you like your ship, a good fellow, and sheer off, for we like your room better than your company; and sheer off at once (adds he) or I will pepper your jacket to a pretty tune."

To show that he meant to be as good as his word, he bade his gunner fire a broadside wide of the black ship, which did the gunner very faithfully, hurting no one. "Though, would to God!" says my uncle afterwards, "I had been wise enough to fire amongst his rigging for a better earnest."

The black ship made no response; but, turning about, held off before the wind half a mile and no more; and my uncle, sailing upon her to make her go to a greater distance, she sheered off, keeping always the same distance; and this maneuver was repeated twice or thrice till Sir Bartlemy, guessing she was endeavoring to lure him away from us, and, seeing it was useless to try and come up to close quarters with a ship that could sail two furlongs to his one, gave up this attempt and rejoined us. Our captain tried to make his men believe that the black ship was what her captain represented, and that he, in still following us—which he did as though he had received no warning, or scorned to accept it—was merely showing a stubborn spirit and not a hostile one, since he had not showed any guns or fired in defiance to us. Some of our better men accepted this; but there were many who could not stomach it, and openly cursed the day when they had come to sea on this venture.

So held we on, and my uncle, hoping the black ship would have to stay for water and refreshment at the Azores (for we had gone from our course that if the black ship were indeed bound for Campeachy she might have no further pretext to hang on our heels), and being himself still very well victualed, would not stay there, but, passing them, bore down towards the Bermudas; but neither would the black ship stay there, but kept to our heels as perversely as ever.

Now, being come to the Bermudas, that befell which I feared, for the seas, which are greatly disturbed at those parts, rose prodigiously, and with it there came a most terrible hurricane, which obliged us to run with a single small sail. This gale did so buffet and hurl us about as we could with much pain keep to our course and reasonably near our consort during the day; but at night it was worse, for no lamps of ours could be kept burning, nor was any of the *Faithful Friend's* to be seen, though from time to time we fired off our petereros for a signal, yet answer got we none. In this terrible tempest we were sorely bruised, our little sail split to shreds, and no chance to rig another, so that we tossed helpless on the water, expecting every moment to founder. But it pleased God to spare us this time.

I shall not dwell on the terrors of that night, nor of the next day, and the night following, but come briefly to the morning of the third day of our tribulation, when, by help of such sails as we could set, we drifted out of that horrid region and came into calmer waters; in which time we had been swept an incredible distance; but, lord! so broken in our masts, riggings, and elsewhere as it was pitiable to see; besides three men short of our number, who we counted were washed away in that hurricano. Then looking around could we see nothing of the *Faithful Friend*, nor of the black ship neither; so that we reckoned one or both had gone to the bottom.

To think that Lady Biddy was no more affected me so grievously that I threw myself on the deck, not caring what became of me, and lamenting that I lay not at the bottom of that cruel sea with her. But Captain Wilkins kept a brave heart (God be praised!), and, hoping yet to see our consort again, contrived to set up some sort of sails, fresh rig his rudder, and restore order on board, so that ere long we were making good way towards Trinidad (as we judged), where it had been agreed we should in case of separation seek rendezvous. On the morning of the fourth day, ere yet there was full daylight, but only twilight, as I was standing on the poop deck very melancholy and dejected, I heard the sound of guns to the south of the course we were making; and Captain Wilkins, to whom I ran in all speed to communicate these tidings, did likewise believe he

heard this sound; whereupon he at once shaped our course in that direction, whereby in a little time we were further assured that these sounds were real, and not bred of imagination. The reports were not apart, like signals, but continuous; so that we knew it was the cannonading of ships in battle, which stirred every man to make all haste; and indeed we did all we could think on to speed our ship; still were we slow, for our want of sail, which made us furious with impatience.

There was a haze upon the water, so that when the tumult of guns was loud in our ears, we could see nothing; but now the sun getting up strong over the horizon and sucking up the mist, we of a sudden caught sight of the flashing guns, and then of a ship not many furlongs off, broadside towards us, which we presently descried to be the black ship; though now her whole side was open with ports, from which her guns shone out like teeth. At the same time we perceived that she was grappled on stem and stern to another ship on the further side, which we doubted not was the *Faithful Friend*; upon which we did all set up a prodigious cheer; and Captain Wilkins putting about, we passed the black ship at less than a furlong distance, and dealt into her the whole weight of our great guns on that side without getting a single shot in return. The reason of this was that all the ship's company were occupied on the other side plying their cannon and boarding the *Faithful Friend* (which we recognized in nearing the black ship), as was evident from the rattle of muskets and small arms between the peals of the great guns.

But after getting this dose from us, they were not long in manning their guns on the hither side, as we found to our cost when, putting about once more, we sailed down to give him the other broadside; for their cannon belched out with such fury as laid many a stout seamen between our decks low, besides shooting away our rudder, which rendered us helpless, as it were.

Seeing this, I begged Captain Wilkins to give me a boat and such of his men as could be spared to go and succor our friends, to which he agreed readily enough, and forthwith lowered our barge; whereupon I, with a score of hearty fellows, all armed to the teeth, sprang in, and rowed with all our might to that side of the grappled ships where lay the *Faithful Friend*. Through one of her lower ports we scrambled, one after the other, but I the first, you may be sure; and there it was all thick with stinking gunpowder and smoke, and strewn with dead men, and such as were too sorely wounded to join in the battle above, and no man ever heard greater din than there was of big guns and small, the clashing of steel, the trampling on the decks, the shouting and cursing of men fighting, and the sad groaning of the hurt, and such confusion as you could not tell one sound from another scarcely.

This did but spur us on to be doing, and like so many cats we sprang up through the hatchways and ladders, and so came on the main deck, taking no heed of the poor fellows who lay heaped at the foot of those ladders, nor of the blood that trickled in thick drops from step to step, splashing in our faces as if it had been mere rain-water, and smeared down the handrails, where many a good man had pressed his bleeding body for support.

Now, as I sprang on deck, did I find myself in the very midst and thick of these wicked pirates, who were readily to be distinguished from honest seamen by red skirts which they wear who bind themselves to the regulations of their Order.

Just before me was a culverdine pointed against the roundhouse, into which the crew of the *Faithful Friend* (such as were not laid low) had retired, and were there barricaded, and a fellow stood over against it, blowing his match to fire the piece. And this man I knew full well for a villain of the old *Sure Hawk's* company, and with the axe in my hand, I struck him between the teeth right through to his neck-joint. He was the first man I had ever slain; but I counted it as nothing, being wrought to very madness with passion, and wrenching my axe from his bone, I turned upon another rascal who was making at my side with his knife, and with a back-handed blow, the hinder part of my weapon crashed his forehead into his brains as you might with your thumb break the shell of an egg into the yolk. By this time my good comrades had sprung up behind me to my help, else had my fight soon come to an end; for the pirates, getting over the amazement into which my sudden attack had thrown them, with a shout of rage turned all upon me. Then did we so lay about us that we beat the pirates back into the fore part of the ship, and truly I do think that if those of our friends in the roundhouse could then have come to our help we should have won the day; but, as ill-luck would have it, they had taken such pains to barricado themselves, to prevent the pirates coming at them, that they could not immediately get out to come at them, and so, for want of support, were we undone. For there were of the pirates two score, I take it, and more coming to their succor over the side every moment, while we, not counting those who may have fallen, were but one score, all told.

Foremost among our enemies was Rodrigues himself, who did look a very devil for rage, with the grime of smoke and blood about his face, his white, pointed tusks bared to the gums, and his eyes flaming with fury. His head was bound about with a bloody clout, for he had got a wound, and through the grime of powder-smoke on his face there was a bright channel where the blood still wept. But for all his wounds he fought better and more desperately than any of the rest; and seeing that those in the roundhouse were struggling to get out to our help, and that his only chance lay in beating us down ere they succeeded, he threw himself forward with nothing but a long curved knife in his hands. His intention was to settle my business, seeing that I had done him this mischief; and surely he would (for I was closely grappled with a fellow, my arms about him and his about me, each seeking to get freedom for the use of the knives in our hands), but that a comrade, seeing my peril, dealt at him with his brown bill, driving the spike into his shoulder. On this, Rodrigues, with a howl of rage, struck out the point from his shoulder, and turning on this poor man with his hooked knife ripped him up from the navel as you might a rabbit. At that moment I threw my man on his back, and in falling on the deck my knife was driven up to the hilt through his loins. Then did I get a terrible blow on the head (from whom I know not), so that I lost all consciousness, and lay like one dead.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BATTLE ENDED TO OUR COMPLETE DISCOMFITURE.

Now must I speak of what happened on board the *Faithful Friend* after my discomfiture; not from my own knowledge—for knowledge had I none, being felled, as I say, like an ox—but from what I afterwards learnt from others.

Headed by Rodrigues, the pirates cleaved our little company in two, and so surrounded them with great numbers that their case was hopeless, and in short time they were beaten down every man, and left for dead, these heartless pirates giving no quarter to any. And while these few were being despatched, Rodrigues, with a following of shouting fiends, returned to attack those who were making their way out of the roundhouse, and by the fury of that onslaught did they cut down all those who had got out, and forced them within once more to set up their barricadoes.

Then, seeing no further danger on board the *Faithful Friend* but such as a round dozen of his rogues might cope with, he called off the rest to return on board his ship to defend it against the *Sea Lion*. For Captain Wilkins, having set out two long sweeps or galley oars from the lower stern gallery to serve as a rudder, had returned to the attack, and coming cheek by jowl with the black ship, he grappled her in his turn, so that now all three ships were bound together, and thus, with their cannons mouth to mouth did they discharge their shot one into the other with incredible bitterness.

But here the black ship being but poorly manned—most of her company being on the *Faithful Friend*—played but the weaker part; seeing which, Master Wilkins resolved to board her with his men, and so make his way over her decks to the deliverance of his consort. He called his men to clamber the sides of the black ship and escalate her bulwarks. But against such an attack was the black ship well provided, for not only were her bulwarks at arm's length above those of the *Sea Lion*, but furnished with a devilish device of broken sword-blades, spikes, and sharp nails set in long spars and lashed to the side, so that nowhere could a man make headway, or surmount without cruel gashes. While the poor brave men were beating down this defense, Rodrigues and his wretches came pouring back to the defense of the black ship, and while some mowed down the attackers from their high bulwarks with axe and sword, other some were sent below to recruit their fellows at the big guns. Rodrigues himself did direct these pieces, so bending down their mouths that the shot should go through the decks to beat out the side below water. And so well did he thrive in this wickedness that presently, after these great guns had been fired, the *Sea Lion* began to fill, and the men on board, seeing they must perish by drowning if they stayed in her, forsook their pieces, and, rushing all on deck, cast aside their arms, fell on their knees, and begged mercy of Rodrigues. And let it not be thought they were cowards for this, but put yourself in their place, and consider if the fear of death would not have moved you to the same distress.

Rodrigues, not wishing to lose all the *Sea Lion* contained, removed his defense of sword blades, etc., and bade the men come up, which they did, all save Captain Wilkins, who, with his sword in his hand, stood alone on the deck. Rodrigues, taking a musket in his hand, bade this brave man lay down his sword or die; but he took no notice of this command, whereupon did Rodrigues level his piece and shot him dead where he stood.

Then Rodrigues sent down a parcel of his men to stanch the leak in the side of the *Sea Lion*, and this they did by lowering a leaded sail upon the outer side to cover the holes; after which the water was pumped out, and the carpenters repaired the breach more securely, so that there was no further peril of her going down.

And now being masters of both ships, the pirates make great rejoicing, for though there were yet those in the roundhouse of the *Faithful Friend* who were unfettered, yet were they close prisoners and powerless to recover their ship, or do mischief, except in foolhardy desperation, to their captors.

To every pirate was dealt out double allowance of meat and drink, but the latter not of a strong kind, for Rodrigues knew full well that a drunken bout might prove their undoing. As for the prisoners they got naught to eat, but only jeers and derision.

While his men were yet carousing, Rodrigues goes on the poop deck of the *Faithful Friend*, and stamping his heel to call attention to those below, he cried out to know if Sir Bartlemy Pengilly was yet alive; to which Sir Bartlemy himself replied:

"Ay," says he, "and I hope to live yet to see you hanged, villain!"

"Well," replies the other, "you'll not get that chance unless you accept my conditions."

"I will make no conditions with such as you," cried my uncle.

"You had better, my friend," says Rodrigues, jeeringly; "'twill save you a deal of trouble in the long run."

To this my uncle made no reply but one of his sea oaths.

"I shall leave you to the better guidance of your company," says Rodrigues "who, I have no doubt, will bring you to reason when they begin to feel the pinch of starvation. But, mark this, if you hurt only by accident a single hair of my men with the arms you hold so precious, I will cannonade you where you are, and spare not one single life."

Then calling to his boatswain he bade him whistle his company to their posts, and pointing to the deck, all hampered with dead and dying men, he cried:

"Look to your comrades; let not one of your fellows who has a spark of life escape your care. For the other carrion, fling it overboard, no matter whether it be dead or living."

These words I heard, for at that moment I was waking from my trance.

CHAPTER XVII.

I AM SHOT OUT OF ONE SHIP AND CRAWL INTO ANOTHER, WITH WHAT ADVANTAGE MAY YET BE SEEN.

My first feeling on recovering consciousness was of a great weight oppressing me, and this I presently found was due to two dead men lying athwart me, where they had fallen in their last agony. Using all my strength, it was as much as I could do to thrust him off—one fellow lying across my breast with his shoulder against my throat, and the other again across my middle, his arms thrown out upon the first.

The cause of my weakness was not that blow that had felled me, but the loss of blood from two wounds—one in my thigh and the other in the thick of my arm—which I had received without any knowledge on my part, and now for the first time discovered by my clothes being glued to those parts and a great smarting when I struggled to free myself from the weight of the dead bodies.

Being once more able to breathe freely, I lay back on the deck exhausted and faint with the effort, and slowly brought back to my mind what had happened. The silence on board, save for the sound of reveling from the black ship alongside, told me that the battle was over; and it needed but little to convince me how the fight had ended; but, thinking of my dear Lady Bidley, I presently set my hands, all stiff and sticky with blood, on the deck, and raised myself up, looking towards the coach. Then it was I saw Rodrigues and heard him order his men to cast all us poor fellows, whom he termed carrion, overboard, without regard to our being dead or living. Then, once more, a weariness as of death coming over me, I fell again on my back, with a giddiness in my head and despair at heart, which robbed me of all vigor, while the stench of spilled blood made my bowels heave with sickness. The pirates, coming now to clear the deck, took up one poor corpse, lifted him on to the bulwarks, and so bundled him over; and in this wise three or four more, when, seeing the labor before them, one fetched from below the wooden gangway wherewith they slide merchandise from a wharf down into a ship, which they now thrust through one of the upper deck gun-ports, making it fast with cords. This way, with less trouble and much quicker, they shot the "carrion" into the water, taking no heed if some poor wretch but slightly wounded did cry for pity and mercy, except by inhuman laughter and fiendish jests.

Two or three rascals came and carried off the corpses I had thrust from me, and then I knew my turn was come, and naught could save me, for I had no strength to help myself. And back came those two (who were new hands and so did not recognize me), and one kicking me over on my face, the other took up my legs by the knees, while the first laid hold of me by the shoulders, and so they bore me, like so much butcher's flesh to the cutting board, and flung me on to the slanting gangway. By this time the slope was all slippery with gore of blood, so that no sooner was I cast on than I slid down like a stone, and shot thence deep into the sea below.

Now, whether I owed it to the cold, invigorating virtue of the refreshing sea, the smarting anew of my wounds in the salt thereof, or the instinct which possesses nearly every creature to make one final struggle for existence in the presence of death, I can not say; only this I know, that no sooner had the waters closed over my head than energy returned to my spirit and strength to my limbs, and striking out manfully with my arms and legs, I shortly came to the surface of the water, not more than a couple of fathoms from the stern of the *Faithful Friend*.

But here was no hold at all, nor could I see that I was much better off than if I had never risen from the deep, till, casting my eyes about, I spied a rope hanging over the stern of the black ship and trailing in the sea, which rope was part of her rigging (for she also had suffered in the gale, to say nothing of our shot). To this I swam, and being still full of new-born vigor, I drew on it till it became taut, and I could keep my head above water with no exertion at all.

Here I rested a bit, all the while searching how I might better my condition, and perceiving that my rope passed over the lower stern gallery, I presently got the rope between my knees, and by passing one hand over the other made a shift to pull myself up, though not without difficulty, for as I drew myself out of the water I began to turn round and round on the strained rope like a joint of meat at the end of a string. However, this was but a trifle of trouble, and hand over hand I climbed up till at length I reached the gallery, where I took another rest, and returned thanks to God with as grateful a heart as I could find.

This gallery, I take it, opened into the steward's room, for through the ports I heard the clinking of mugs and the voices of men within, and seeing that at any moment some fellow might look out and spy me, I felt it would not do to linger there; so I went again to my rope, which hung conveniently on one side of the ports, and pulled myself up to the gallery above, which is what is called the captain's parade, that balcony against the chief cabins where the officers alone are privileged to walk. Here, as luck would have it, the wreck of a sail hanging down from the deck above formed a kind of screen, where I might rest for the present secure from observation. With a glad heart I crawled under this refuge, and, sitting down to fetch my breath, I thought it not amiss to look to my wounds. On the crown of my head was a lump as big as a fair egg, and the scalp cut, but no longer bleeding; in my thigh was a pike wound about three inches long, but not deep. By tearing off the foot of my stocking and so drawing the other part high, I managed to make a very fair dressing for this wound. The other, which was, as I say, in the fleshy part of my arm, gave me little anxiety, for, though it still bled pretty freely, I could get at it easily, and, binding it round with my neckerchief, I felt no further concern about it, but only satisfaction to find that my case was no worse.

Scarcely had I come to this conclusion when I heard the trampling of feet on the deck above, and the sound of voices, with one in a higher tone giving orders. And the first thing these men did was to haul upon the sail which screened me.

"I am a lost man if I stay here longer," thinks I; so slipping along still under the sail I came to the little door opening on to the gallery. By happy chance this was not fastened, save by a latch, and seeing, as I peered through the lattice window, that no one was on the other side, I slipped through, and found myself in a prodigious fine cabin; for this Rodrigues was no common, sluttish jack-sailor, but a man who, when he could afford it, lived like any prince, indulging himself in every extravagant luxury that a voluptuous taste can conceive. Here was a thick carpet on the floor, and all round the sides ran a sofett, furnished with cushions in the Moors' style, with fine paintings and mirrors above, and a lantern of colored glass like gems hanging from the ceiling, which was painted as pretty as could be with devices of flowers and cherubs. To the windows were silk curtains of a rose color; but to speak of all these appointments have I no time; only will I say this, that never anywhere else have I seen such expense wasted as in the cabin of this scoundrel pirate. Nor had I time or inclination then to take note of all this bravery, being only concerned to find me some hole where I might hide for safety. And now came a bustle on the outside of the cabin, so that I felt I had but come out of the frying-pan into the fire, and which way to turn I knew not. I could not go into the body of the ship for the men there, nor back into the gallery neither for the men above; yet to stay where I stood would be as bad as either.

In this pickle I halted till spying an opening on one side between the sofetts, I pushed the gilded panel to see if, perchance, this were some fantastic kind of door; and, sure enough, it was, giving way readily to my hand, and closing behind me softly with spring-work. And there I found myself in a cabin smaller than the other, but still mighty fine, and fitted up as a bed-chamber, with a good cot fixed on one side, hung with saffron taffety. Other door to this chamber was there none; nor could I see any place of safety but under the cot, whither therefore I did creep—recommending myself to Providence—without further ado, and not a whit too soon neither, for scarcely had I got my long legs well out of sight when the door opened and a boy came in, as I could see by his little bare feet peeping under the valance.

Putting my eye close to the ground, I saw him go to a polished chest on the other side and fetch from one drawer a clean shirt and a pair of stockings; then from another slop shoes, a pair of trunks, and the like; till, having set out all that was necessary, he gathered them up in his arms and carried them away, from which I opined that Rodrigues had yet another cabin where he was about to change his bloody and besmirched clothes for these other. Nor was I far out in this surmise, for in some ten minutes or so, the door was flung open, and I caught sight of those same slop-shoes and clean stockings for a moment as he stood by the side of the cot thrusting back the curtains before he threw himself down to rest. As his deep breathing proclaimed that he had fallen asleep, I was for a while sorely tempted to creep out from my hiding-place and cut the villain's throat as he lay there; nay, so well could I make out where he lay over my head that, putting the point of my jack-knife against the sacking, I felt sure that I could, with one forcible thrust, drive it up into his black heart. Yet I could not do this either way; for, first, my sentiment revolted against taking the life of a defenseless man, as against murder—despite his cruel treatment of the helpless wounded and myself—and then my reason forbade me to attempt such a desperate measure, for if Rodrigues died there yet remained forty or fifty desperate villains to overcome, and how was one wounded man by any possibility to accomplish that feat? To fail in such an attempt would be to provoke the enemy to such a fury of revenge that he would massacre every one of those whose release had been attempted. I say massacre, but a yet worse fate might be reserved for Lady Biddy, whose dear sake now did most concern me. With this reflection I gently shut up my jack-knife, and slipped it back into my pocket for better employment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GREATLY PUT TO IT TO KNOW WHAT TO DO, I DO NOTHING.

The bumping and grinding together of the ships had ceased before Rodrigues came to take rest, showing that the grapnels were cast off that bound the three ships together; and now, from the easy movement, I surmised that we were under way, and making for some haven for the greater convenience of repairing injuries, distributing of stores, refreshment, etc., which was indeed the case. On board the *Sea Lion* Rodrigues had set a sufficiency of men to work her, and on the *Faithful Friend* a greater number for a like purpose, and to serve as guard over the prisoners in the roundhouse, while the rest he took with him on board his own ship to lead the way and conduct the prizes he had taken. About eight o'clock that evening (as I judge) we seemed to have come into very smooth water, and then the boy coming to the cabin called to Rodrigues that the master did wish to speak to him; whereupon Rodrigues sprang up and went out. Then for the first time could I stretch my limbs with ease; for though the bustle on deck, the hammering of the carpenters, and such noisy business affected his slumbers not in the least, yet did I but turn upon the carpet under his cot, his breathing would show that the sound had alarmed his senses, which was a remarkable thing, but not without parallel, for those who live in peril develop, as I may say, a new sense which never sleeps. Thus had I been constrained to lie very still (which was doubtless of great advantage to me for the healing of my wounds, but very little to the repose of my bones), for I knew full well that had he found me under his cot he would have slain me there, helpless as I was for defense, without any such compunction as stayed my hand from taking his life.

So now, as I say, being free to move, I stretched myself and turned me about with great relief and satisfaction, for here, as I take it, had I been lying on my back without motion the best part of ten hours. Presently I heard the voice of Rodrigues on the deck above, and feeling mighty faint for want of food, I lifted the valance and peeped out. There was just light enough to descry a wine-cooler in the corner of the cabin over against the chest I have mentioned, and urged on by my necessity I made bold to wriggle out from my hiding-place and creep over to it. By good chance it was unlocked, and inside were half a dozen good bottles, of which I scrupled not to appropriate the first I laid my hand on; then to make a good job of it while I was about it, I pried into a cabinet hard by, when by another good chance I lighted on a dish of dried raisins. Well content with this booty, I hied me back under the cot, and rolling up a corner of the carpet to serve as a pillow, I managed to refresh myself to my heart's content. Nay, I think I drank more of that wine (the most excellent that ever I did taste) than was good, for despite my determination to keep awake, I unconsciously fell asleep, which was the maddest thing a man in his right senses could have done; for had Rodrigues come back into that cabin he would surely have discovered me by my hard breathing; but this (thanks be to God!) he did not do; for having rested himself, he gave permission to his crew to relax awhile likewise, himself going on board the *Faithful Friend* for the better custody of the prisoners there, as I believe.

At this time the three ships, brought all well together, lay anchored within a good bay (as I am told) in an island which I take it must have been one of the Bahamas.

I was awake by a bustling in the next cabin, to find the sun streaming full under the edge of the cot valance. I heard Rodrigues speaking there in a tone of command, but what he said my senses were yet too confused to make out; then I caught sight of the boy's feet again as he entered that one where I lay and set something down. And now he comes very briskly to the cot and sets about stripping it; that done, he shakes up the bed, turns it over as any maid would, and fetch out from the chest clean sheets, which he lays in the place of those who had stripped off, and so makes up the bed; after which he sets the furniture in order, and, tucking the foul linen under his arm, goes out.

All this while there was prodigious hurrying to and fro over head, tumbling of heavy goods below, creaking of pulleys, shouting of orders, and like confusion, which was caused by the shipping aboard of the black ship all the stores and treasure belonging to the *Sea Lion* and the *Faithful Friend*, to which this rogue Rodrigues had a fancy. But to think that in the midst of all this pother he took heed to having clean sheets laid in this bed did astonish me beyond all things.

The bustle continued all the morning; once or twice the boy came in with parcels, which he set atop of that he had already brought, but nothing else occurred to disturb my meditations. And these, as I grew accustomed to the noise around me, were of a very melancholy sort, not because of the sad outlook concerning my own fortunes, for I may truly say I had grown in a sort callous and indifferent to what became of me, but for thinking of Lady Biddy. I took myself very grievously to task for having slept all through that night like a log while she was in such an extremity.

"Is this your devotion, wretch!" says I to myself—"is this your love, that you can slumber in peace while she, hived up with rude sailors, destitute of common necessities, is in peril of death at the hands of her wicked persecutors? Have you no bowels of pity, that you could make not one effort to save her, rascal?"

In this way I taunted myself, until, falling into a more reasonable state of mind, I began to reason as to what I might yet do in her behalf. I concluded from the shifting of the stores that Rodrigues had determined to abandon the two ships with their crew, for the mere hulls could be of little value to him. Coming to this decision, I was for getting away from the black ship and rejoining the *Faithful Friend*, that I might be near by Lady Biddy; but what could I then do? Was not this rather a gratification of my own selfish desire than a means of benefiting her? Was I not simply adding another hungry mouth to that destitute company? With these and a hundred such fruitless arguments did I torment myself; now preparing myself to get away, now resigning myself to stay where I was, getting no nearer to a rational determination in the end that I was in the beginning.

I was still in this torment when I heard the anchor weighing and the men singing as they used to do at this business. Suddenly their singing ceased, and I heard a great angry clamor of voices from a distance; nay, I do think I heard my uncle's big voice above the rest, and then the fellows above replying with laughter and derision, so that I knew we were leaving that unhappy company behind, as was the more evident by the bending of the ship before the wind. Then, desperate to think I was being carried away from Lady Biddy, I took resolution to dash through the cabin to the gallery and cast myself into the sea, and to this end I had set my hands and feet against the wall, to thrust my body from under the cot, when the door was thrown violently open, the cabin entered, and the sacking of the bed was pressed down over my head, which made me think that Rodrigues had come again to rest himself.

Turning silently on my back I glanced under the valance. At a little distance were the bare feet of the boy; close to the valance, standing beside the cot, were the feet of a man. Thus they stood immovable for a space, and then lightly they moved away and the door was closed behind them. But the sacking still bulged downward with the weight thrown on the bed. "Had Rodrigues laid there a wounded comrade?" I asked myself.

That it was Rodrigues who had entered and left the cabin I was sure, for I now heard his voice speaking low, as if giving orders to the boy, in the one adjoining.

If it be a wounded comrade he has laid here, then he is badly hurt, thought I, as I lay with my eyes fixed on the sacking, for there was no sign of movement; nor was there any sound of groaning or the like.

Only for a few minutes did matters stand thus, however; then there was a little movement above, followed by a quick start, and the next instant, in the space below the valance, I saw descend the sweetest little foot that ever man did see, and then its fellow, both neatly shod, after which fell the hem of an envious petticoat that shut them from my sight.

My heart quite ceased to beat as I asked myself, "Who is this woman?"

For a moment she stood where she had stepped to the ground, as if looking around to realize where she was; then like any doe she sprang toward the little windows that opened on to the gallery, and looking out, she gave a moan of despair, that by which plaintive, delicate sound, I knew that this dear creature was Lady Biddy.

CHAPTER XIX.

I MAKE MYSELF KNOWN TO LADY BIDDY, WITH DIVERS OTHER MATTERS.

Scarce had this piteous moan passed her tender lips when Rodrigues (as I am told), opening the door, made her a mighty respectful reverence, and, says he—

"Madam, I am delighted you have recovered of your swoon, and I trust you feel no ill-effect of the rough usage we were forced to exercise in bringing you hither."

"Where am I?" cried Lady Biddy, fiercely. "Why have you brought me here?"

"You are on board the *Robin Goodfellow*," says he, gravely, "or, as my fellows prefer to call it, the *Black Death*; and I have brought you here because I had not the heart to leave you on the *Faithful Friend*, to endure the hardships to which her company must be reduced."

"Where is my uncle? Get you hence and bring him to me!" she cries, with the same impetuous fury.

"In anything else I shall obey you punctually," says he; "but it is impossible for me to comply with this demand, for Sir Bartlemy Pengilly is in the ship yonder, which we are leaving behind."

"You gave him your promise that not one of those who were in the roundhouse should be injured in any way if he laid down his arms. It was to save me from the violence of your crew that he submitted himself with the brave men who stood by him."

"Madam, it was to that very end I gave my promise. Undoubtedly, had your uncle stood out, I could not have stayed my company from firing into the roundhouse and putting an end to the obstinate resistance there, notwithstanding you were likely to have fallen a victim with your friends."

"Would to God we had met that fate, rather than trust to your promises, dastard villain!" says she; "for then had there been an honorable end to their woes and mine."

"Patience, patience, lady!" says he, in a tone calculated only to arouse her greater indignation. "You are much too young to die, and too beautiful. Trust me, your fate will be a happier one than you can at present conceive. When your spirits are calmer you will see that this unfortunate business is due to the impetuosity of your uncle, and that I am the best friend you could have found, in the midst of deplorable circumstances. Your uncle fired the first shot, and the first man who fell in the conflict was on board this ship. Could you expect my men to see their innocent comrades slaughtered with indifference, or me to make no effort for their preservation from further mischief? We fought, and having overcome those who would have overcome us, we did all that a magnanimous victor could reasonably afford to do. We forgave those who laid down their arms, and gave them a ship to continue their journey in. I had promised no injury should be inflicted upon you, and for that reason I brought you hither, where, as you see, you will be not ill-lodged, and shall have the best nurture and service the stores and my company can offer. Had I left you on the *Faithful Friend* your case would have been different, for the vessel is badly injured, and I fear the company will be sorely put to it for provisions, as, to supply our own wants, we were obliged to take from her stores—a poor recompense for the loss and injury inflicted upon us. I have been careful to have your personal effects brought hither for your use; they are here. If anything is short of your requirements, or if—"

"Silence!" cried Lady Biddy, who, turning her back on Rodrigues, had tried to turn a deaf, indifferent ear to his harangue, but was at length by his long-winded perseverance and mock-humility wrought to an intolerable degree of impatience. "Silence!" cries she, turning upon him and stamping her little foot. "Leave me, or, by my soul, I'll put an end to this torment another way," and indeed (as I learn) she did look around in desperation for some instrument wherewith to destroy herself, being very bitterly aggrieved by this hypocrite.

Again this Rodrigues makes her a low reverence, and with his hand on the door says, "I shall hope to find your spirits easier when I next give myself the pleasure to inquire after your condition. I have had refreshment placed in this next cabin, and should you need anything, you have but to pull the bell. And so good-morning to your ladyship."

Lady Biddy gave him no reply, but as soon as he had closed the second door after him—turning the key in the outside, she ran to the bed, and casting herself upon it, gave vent to her feeling in an agony of tears.

And to hear her sobbing above me, yet striving to smother the sound, lest Rodrigues should know that her pride had broken down, would have touched any stony heart. It was so pitiful to my ear that the tears coursed down my own cheeks as I listened.

Thus she sobbed in a great tumult for some while, and then her passion softening into mere maiden's sorrow, she murmured in a low tone, still smothering her sweet voice in the pillow lest it should be heard, and yet not able to keep quite silent either—"Oh, my heart! Oh, my poor heart!" and this she said over and over again—"Oh, my poor heart! Oh, my heart!" with mournful tremor, unable to find other words to express the commotion of her feelings.

Now would I have given anything to be of comfort to her, yet I dared not come forth from where I lay, lest my sudden appearance should move her to cry out with terror ere she discerned who I was, which would have brought Rodrigues back in a twinkling, and ruined all. So I waited patiently awhile, and when she ceased to make moan, and only sobbed at intervals, like a child exhausted with weeping, I began to gently scratch the tick of the bed with my finger-nail, making no more noise than might a mouse nibbling.

Of this she at first took no notice, but anon I observed she smothered a sob, as if to listen with greater attention, and then by the movement above I noticed she had started up as if resting on her elbow; as I still continued the scratching, she presently made a movement of the clothes, as if to frighten the thing away, for the bravest of women do greatly fear a mouse; upon which, ceasing to scrape the tick, I said quickly, in a very low whisper—

"Do not cry out, a friend is here—I, Benet Pengilly!"

Then whipped she off the bed, yet making no sound, and I, putting my hands and feet as I have aforesaid against the wall, pushed myself out from my cramped hiding-place, and got upon my feet before her, raising my finger and casting my eyes about for fear of discovery.

I must have been very villainous and horrid to look upon, my hair untrimmed and hanging about my face in dank wisps clotted with blood from my wound, my clothes in a like pickle, and no cleaner in my flesh than the sea had washed me the day before; but such horrors had she seen that her senses were, as it were, the accustomed to such dreadful images, and she saw me no worse than others, but rather better, for being there a friend where she thought was none but enemies.

Catching the meaning of my gesture, she went quickly to the panel door and spied into the next cabin, whence she came back light of foot, nodding to assure me all was safe. Then she gave me her hand, and I taking no heed whether mine was reasonably clean or proper to hold so dainty, delicate a thing, took it; and to feel those soft, cool fingers clinging tightly to my rough palm, did seem to contract every muscle of my back with physical delight. Also was my heart quickly moved with joy to perceive in her dear eyes—though they were swollen and red with weeping—a bright beam of hope and satisfaction, whilst the corners of her lips curved with a little smile.

Coming quite close to me, she whispered eagerly in my ear—

"You will save me, Benet, won't you? You will be my good friend?"

"Ay," says I as softly as she (if that might be). "With God's help, no harm shall befall you."

On this she presses my hand a little closer, and then goes again to the door, from which she returns with almost a child's glee to tell me all is safe, and to ask by what miracle I came to her succor.

This joy in the midst of such trouble and peril, this kindness to me for whom she had shown little liking hitherto, but rather detestation for the most part, will seem unnatural, as being contrary to the proud, high spirit and independence of Lady Biddy, and so would it have been at any other time; but there is none—be he a man and never so strong—but grief and terrible anxiety will reduce to the unresisting soft temper of a child; so I do think and thus explain this truth. And, indeed, she gave present proof of weakness, for while the smile was yet on her lips, she clasps her hand to her heart and sinks down, sitting on the bed as if she could no longer hold her footing.

Seeing she was faint, I went with all speed and reckless into the next chamber for that refreshment Rodrigues said was set there for her use—than which no madder thing fool ever did, for there were windows opposite the gallery looking on to the deck, and had one been prying there I must have been seen, for all the two curtains were drawn, there being space enough for one to peep through from the outside if he were so minded. But—thanks be to God!—there was no one spying, and so I got the tray of refreshments from the table where it lay and carried it into the next cabin with no mischance.

This tray I set on the bed beside Lady Biddy, and she ate and drank with appetite, poor soul, for all the time they had been shut up in the roundhouse—she, with her uncle, and the poor remnant of his company—not one had broken fast, for there was neither bit nor sup to be got. Which also is a reason for that behavior of Lady Biddy's to which I have spoken as seeming unnatural.

While she satisfied her own cravings she made me eat likewise, whereto I was nowise loth myself, having eaten nothing for many hours but a few paltry raisins.

As she sat on the bed, I knelt on the ground by her feet for my better convenience in eating and also conversing in that low tone to which we were constrained. So as we ate I told her how I had come aboard and hidden myself, with other matters which there is no necessity to repeat; and this I did with reasonable calm, but the abounding joy and gladness of my heart to be there alone with that dear lady, kneeling at her very feet, listening to her whisper, feasting my eyes when hers were on the refreshment and I dared to do so unseen, no pen can describe, as I doubt also no imagination can conceive.

After she had eaten and drunk and would no more, being much refreshed and invigorated, I was for taking the tray back; but here her quick wit appearing where my dullness showed, she pointed out the danger, and taking the tray, carried it herself into the next chamber.

Coming back she seated herself on a settle that ran along one side of the cabin and bidding me sit beside her, asked how I meant to contrive her escape, which indeed would have been a poser for me at another time, but did now to my excited

imagination appear the easiest thing in the world. For when one's spirits are filled with joy there seems nothing insurmountable, as, on the other hand, in grief we can see no way out of our trouble.

"Why," says I, "we need not fear but we shall get away safe enough, and shortly too. For, as Rodrigues obligingly told you, the company is short of victuals, and must therefore lose no time in seeking a port where they can refresh with meat and drink; besides that, the ship may need looking to for the damage she has got. And being in a port where there are Christian souls, what is to keep us here?"

"A rascal named Rodrigues," says Lady Biddy very pertinently.

"Pish!" says I. "I have escaped him times enough to know he is a fool, for all his pretense to cleverness. Nay, have I not hid myself under his own cot in broad day? Not dreaming but you are helpless, he will think you sufficiently secured if he locks the door and sets one of his rascals to watch it. But the stern gallery is open, and as I got in so can I get out, with the night to give me help and better security."

"Do you think it will be as easy for me?" asks Lady Biddy doubtfully.

"Ay, I shall make it so, please God," says I. "For in the night that I swim to shore will I bring back a boat, and by a ladder of ropes shall you get down into it."

Lady Biddy here nodded her head in hopeful approval.

"Once on shore we may hide ourselves safely, I do not question, and Rodrigues dare not waste a long time in looking for us, since the necessity that brought him hither will also bring on Sir Bartlemy. Then dare not these rascal pirates stay, lest they bring themselves to their well-earned gallows."

Then again Lady Biddy nodded to show her satisfaction, clasping her little hands at the same time, with a sigh in which all her trouble seemed to be wafted away. But in this moment of our confidence on future escape were we brought to consciousness of our present peril by the sudden opening of the door in the further chamber.

Together we started to our feet, and my first thought was to fetch the jack-knife from my pocket, but Lady Biddy, with that self-command which does animate women above men in the hour of danger to do the right thing and not the foolish one, quickly laid her hand on my arm to keep me still, and putting on as stern an air as any tragic player, went to the little betwixt door to ask Rodrigues why he dared disturb her.

But no Rodrigues was there; for it was only the little blackguard boy he had sent in to know if madam would take a dish of chocolate.

When she had dismissed him, saying she needed no more today (it being now pretty nigh sundown, for I have bridged over many things), but would have her breakfast brought the next morning at seven, she came back to me, and we continued to talk of our escape, like any children of air-castles, till the light faded.

And then with some trouble I began to see that I must presently go out of that chamber; and also I think Lady Biddy grew uneasy as to how I might conduct myself in the darkness of night, and she, so to speak, at my mercy.

Again the outer door opened; and this time the boy came to light the hanging lantern. She left the between door open when the lamp was lit and the boy again gone, and by a more cheerful bearing seemed to feel more security for this light.

"Presently," says I, "you will go in and put out that lamp."

"Why? Is it not more cheerful to have a light?" says she.

"Yes," says I, "but with that light burning I dare not go through the next cabin."

"Through it!" says she, in wonder, and yet with a little fear in her tone; "whither are you going?"

"Out on the gallery," says I, "where I shall sleep very safely till the morning."

This would she not hear of, but would have me lie in her room while she reposed on the sofett in the next; that would I not allow, and so at length we compromised it in this wise: she kept her own chamber after putting out the lamp, and I, having bolted the door in the outer cabin, lay myself on the cushions, she giving me her cloak that I might wrap it about me and so seem to be she if by accident she so overslept herself that she could not admit me to the inner chamber before daybreak.

And so with the cloak that she had worn on her dear body pressed to my lips, I fell asleep that night a happier man than ever before I had been in all my life.

CHAPTER XX.

BY GOOD HAP I DISCOVER A FRESH PIECE OF VILLAINY.

I say I fell asleep the happiest of men, with sweet, delightful thoughts of that dear creature who lay separated from me but by the thickness of a few paneled boards; yet were my senses not so completely lulled to forgetfulness but that they were quick to take alarm at that which menaced her security, for suddenly I awoke, hearing a sound at that door which opened to the deck which I had, as aforesaid, made fast on the inner side.

Sitting bolt upright I could see naught, for the darkness was impenetrable; but it was enough that I had ears to know some one was trying the door. Slowly I heard the latch grating as it was lifted in the catch, and then the door creak as it was pressed from without; but, thanks be to God, the bolt held firm. There was no light on the deck, or I should have caught some glimmer through the silk blinds of the windows; I could see no more than if I had been stone blind. And the only other sound I heard was a sweeping down of rain upon the deck overhead. Presently the latch fell again, as my strained hearing could well perceive, and then there was a pause of some minutes, when again the latch was lifted slowly, and the door gave a smart crack under the pressure against it.

At the first sound I had started to my feet and opened my jack-knife; and thus I stood all the while this attempt was making, with my hair on end and my tongue cleaving to my gullet in a terrible fear, not of the mischief that might befall me, but that in such darkness I might fail to kill him who would harm Lady Biddy.

The latch fell for the second time, and there was no further attempt to open the door, but for a long while I stood there with my knife clenched in my hand.

When I came to reason on this attempt, I concluded that Rodrigues had no hand in it, for it was not his manner to go that way to work, but rather some villain of his crew; whosoever it was, that bolt saved his life for the time, for I do believe that had he been powerful as Hercules, I should have rent him to pieces before he set foot in the chamber where Lady Biddy lay.

I slept no more that night, you may be sure, nor did I deem it safe to put up my knife until the windows in the gallery becoming faintly visible showed that day was at hand. And now, feeling there was no further danger for the present, I opened the little gallery door, and creeping out into the rain, made a shift to cleanse myself somewhat, and set my hair in order, using my fingers for a comb.

By the time this was done, and I had gone back into the cabin, and got my coat, etc., our common safety demanded that I should arouse Lady Biddy, which I did by scratching gently against the partition as we had arranged overnight, and she replied by scratching the wainscot on her side. When she was dressed she came out from her room, and I saw the upper part of her graceful figure and her small head, revealed against the light, now pretty well advanced, on the gallery windows. Then stooping low that I might not likewise be revealed to any one peering through the fore windows, I crept into the cabin she had left, which, to my senses, was like any flower-garden with the fresh perfume of her breath.

Anon she came back to that chamber, and giving me her hand told me (to my questioning) that she had slept well; and I told her nothing of what had happened in the night, that no trouble should disturb her repose if it pleased Providence to keep us prisoners there another night.

Then we fell to discoursing (very low) as to our conduct during the day. With reluctance I advised her to keep in the outer chamber, that Rodrigues might suspect nothing, owning that for our deliverance I saw no better help than to be guided by circumstances as they arose.

She made no objection to this counsel. "But," says she, "What shall I do if that villain comes to me?" (meaning Rodrigues.)

To this I replied (though it went against the grain), that whilst he behaved civilly she would do well to tolerate his visits and listen to what he said. "For," says I, "though you hold the door, and exclude him for a minute, he can, if he will, burst it open, and by thus bringing about one act of violence may you lead to another. To force we can only oppose force, and his power is out of all proportion to ours; wherefore it behoves us to use such strategy as we may, for only thus can we live to take advantage of a better opportunity."

"You are right," says she, with such submissiveness in her voice as I had never expected to hear. "I will do as you bid me. But should he overstep the bounds of civility?"

"Then," says I, grinding my teeth, "be sure that, whatever may afterwards befall, he shall die."

Soon after this the boy raps at the outer door, and brings in Lady Biddy's breakfast. Having set it on the table and placed a chair for her very orderly, he moves as if he would go into the inner cabin, when Lady Biddy, catching him quickly by the arm, cries:

"Where are you going, child? What do you want in there?"

"Why, madam," says he, "I am but going to make your bed, and set your cabin in order, as my master bade me."

"Nay," says she, "I can do all there is to be done myself."

With that she leads the boy to the door and sends him away; so was I again saved from discovery.

To make sure that no one was watching her, Lady Biddy pulled up the blinds in the fore windows, and finding she was unobserved, this kind soul, even before she tasted a morsel herself, whips a portion of her victuals into a dish and brings it to me for my comfort, and sure no food was ever so seasoned to excite the appetite as this to which her kindness gave its savor.

As she brought the dish to me, so she took it away, and at the same time a book from the store of her goods which Rodrigues had caused to be brought into the cabin.

Seating herself on the sofett, she disposed herself to read, yet with little ability to distract her thoughts, for every moment she expected to see Rodrigues; and while she was thus employed, the boy comes to take away the dishes, etc., and this being done and the crumbs swept up, he again crosses towards the inner cabin. Whereupon, in a terrible taking, Lady Biddy, starting up once more, checks him—

"Why will you persevere in entering my chamber?" cries she, "when I tell you I will do all that is necessary there?"

"'Tis no fault of mine," says the child. "My master told me to fetch some clothes of his from the chest, and I must do his bidding."

"Tell me what you need and I will get it," says Lady Biddy, going to the betwixt door; and then seeing at a glance that I had concealed myself, she adds, in a tone of indifference, "Nay, fetch them yourself," and so goes back with her book to the sofett.

I had crept to my old hiding-place under the cot when the boy first came into the next cabin, for fear of accident, and now, as I lay there, I could see all that he did. First of all, he went to the chest and duly laid out a suit of clothes; then taking a quick glance through the half-open door to make sure Lady Biddy was not observing him, he turns about, and going to one corner of the cabin, strips up the carpet, does something to the boards (which I could not see for my position), and then as swiftly turns back the carpet to its place. This done, the little villain shuts to the drawer of the chest with a bang, and goes out of the room with the clothes in his arms, as if that had been all his errand.

I lost no time in creeping out and crossing to that corner of the cabin to see what that boy had been about; and, at a glance, I perceived the whole business as I turned back the carpet. Here, in the boards, was a hinged hatch or trap door with a ring whereby to raise it, and a bolt to make it secure—ring, bolt, and hinge being sunk in the boards, flush, and neatly done as any joiner's work. The bolt was slipped back so that the trap could be opened from below, and I doubted not that this had been the work of that little villain boy. Moreover, as I had concluded that he who tried the door in the night was not Rodrigues, so I surmised that this undoing of the hatch was not of his ordering (since there was no reason for his going about in this fashion), but rather the independent measures of the boy to get into the cabin for pilfering purposes, or of some one of the crew who had won over the boy to his will for more villainous purpose. For the present I contented myself with shooting back the bolt, returning the carpet to its place, and getting back to my hiding-place under the cot.

CHAPTER XXI.

I MAKE A VOW TO SLAY MY LADY BIDDY, IF NEEDS BE.

About noon Rodrigues came into the cabin where my Lady Biddy sat, with his hair combed, rings on his fingers, and rigged out in a new suit of clothes—as fine as any popinjay. Taking off his hat with a low salute, he observed that the heavy rain was past, and fairer weather might now be expected, and so seated himself with easy insolence near Lady Biddy, who thereupon rose to her feet, and stood calmly waiting for him to announce his business there.

"I have come," says he, "to know if I can add anything to your convenience or comfort here during the stay which, as I pointed out yesterday, circumstances have necessitated."

"You can make my captivity less intolerable," replies Lady Biddy, "by letting me know at once when it is to end."

"If this breeze continues we may fairly expect to be at our journey's end in four days," says he.

"And what do you intend to do with me then?" asks Lady Biddy.

"Rather let me ask you, madam," says he, with a hideous smile, "what you intend to do with me?"

"I do not understand what you mean by that," replies Lady Biddy.

"It is for you to command," says he, "and for me to obey in anything that is possible."

"If I demand my freedom—liberty to return to my friends!" says she, perplexed by his sophistry, for she knew full well that this seeming compliance was but a mask and a snare.

"Certainly," says he, still with that hideous smile, "nothing can be more reasonable; and if it will give you happiness and promote that better opinion of me, which I hope one day you will entertain, I shall do my utmost to help you to find your friends."

Lady Biddy knew not what response to make to this fine speech, his promises being far too good to accept for his true intent; so she waited, looking at him to continue, but with much disgust and loathing, for there was lust in his face and devilish wickedness in his eyes, as leaning back on the sofett he surveyed her person from head to foot, and again brought his gaze slowly up to her face.

"Pardon me," says he, "your beauty distracts my thoughts from the subject of our conversation. Where was I? Ah, yes. Santiago de León de Caracas, whither we are now sailing, is an agreeable place. I have friends there. You must know that I am a Spanish gentleman by birth. There is a palace on the side of a hill facing the sea which I think will prove to your taste. You who have lived always in England can have no idea of the beauty of the country. I am sure you will be enchanted with it."

"What is this country or its palaces to me?" cries Lady Biddy, beginning to see his drift.

"You must have a roof to shelter you, and I could offer nothing less than a palace."

"I ask but my liberty that I may return to my friends in England."

"As you please," says he, airily. "I think you will change your mind when you see what a lovely place I propose for your home. However, if, after seeing it, you are still minded to return to England, to England you shall return. It will not be far out of that course to run round by the mouth of the Oronoque and take up poor Sir Harry Smidmore, if he be still on the island where the mutineers left him. Nor is there any reason why you should not cruise about in search of your uncle, Sir Bartlemy Pengilly. Thus would your pleasure in going home be unmarred by any anxiety on account of absent friends."

Once more did he pause to gloat on the perplexity and trouble in that dear face, which I warrant was become deadly pale with dreadful apprehension. His delight in her torture was like nothing but the pleasure of some cat that plays with a poor mouse before tearing it with cruel talons. Nay, I have observed that some men of the baser sort do strangely mingle cruelty with that sort of love they cherish, so that you will see such fellows take pleasure in making women weep.

"For my own part," continues this Rodrigues, with cool audacity, "it is no matter whether I live in the Indies or in Cornwall, so that I be in your company."

Thus did this wicked cynic so reveal his intent that Lady Biddy could no longer doubt what was behind. Yet did she strive to control her indignation, with the faint hope that she misjudged his meaning.

"I do not ask you to go to England," says she. "All I beg is that you set me ashore, and let me make my way home as God shall please to guide me."

"That is impossible, and I should be unworthy of your respect if I consented to such a course. Beauty such as yours is too rare at Santiago to be set light store by. Believe me, you would never be suffered to leave that city if once you set foot in it. You

would become the slave and property of the first who could lay his hand on you. I myself should not dare to take you on shore till a priest had given me a legal right to possess you."

"What!" cries she, losing control of her temper; "do you think I will ever consent to become your wife?"

"Yes," he replies, "I think you will when you consider the matter calmly."

And with that he rose, as if to give her opportunity for reflection. But now, her spirit terribly moved with righteous anger, she stopped him.

"Villain," says she, "do you refuse to give me my liberty?"

"If you mean do I refuse to abandon you to such a fate as would be yours in being set alone on shore at Caracas, I reply yes," says he, with less hypocrisy and plainer than he had yet spoken. "If you refuse to be the wife of a Spanish gentleman you shall certainly not become the slave of a mongrel peasant."

"You intend to keep me an unwilling prisoner on board this ship?"

"I do," says he, "in the hope—nay, in the firm belief—that you will willingly agree to be my wife by the time we reach England."

"In England there are gallows for such rascal pirates as you."

"No," says he, catching hold of her arm ere she could escape his touch, and holding her firmly—"not when they have friends to protect them, and have the wit to close the mouths of enemies. No one will bring disgrace on Lady Biddy by hanging her husband and the father of her children. For my sake, to save me from the gallows, you will consent to become my wife. If that be not sufficient reason, then you will marry me for your own sake. The wife of Don Sanchez Rodrigues de Arevalo may hold up her head in the King's court; but the mistress of Rodrigues, the pirate, flung ashore at Plymouth, dare not crawl to show her face at Falmouth. You will see," adds he, freeing her arm, and with a return to his former hypocritical fair seeming—"you will see that what I propose is entirely to your advantage, and inevitable as the setting of the sun."

Thereupon he makes her another low obeisance, turns on his heel, and struts out of the cabin.

All these particulars did Lady Biddy lay before me when she had bolted the door after Rodrigues' departure and come into the next chamber, which she could well do at that time without arousing suspicion. Many times she paused and could not speak for indignation and offended pride; nay, I think she would have kept this matter to herself, but that I pressed her to tell all for my better guidance. Tears she had not one, for passion held them back.

"Does he think," says she, with scorn that scarce permitted her to bate her voice—"does he think that ever I will live to be his slave? I could cut this arm off because his foul hand has touched it. I will die a thousand deaths rather than submit to such injury. Promise me, Benet, that if you hear me cry for help—"

"Fear not," says I, interrupting her. "My knife was drawn, and I stood ready by the little door all the time I heard the muttering of his voice in there. So will I stand prepared when next he comes, and be assured I will have his life if you cry to me."

"Nay," says she; "take my life first and his after, for I would not outlive my shame."

I tried to sooth her mind, which was overmuch exalted, and bade her not think of death while any hope remained, but rather trust to my ability to effect our escape when we came to that port he had spoken of.

"And now," says I, "do pray go back, and seem to make light of this matter; for I fear that if he be undeceived in his hopes he may bring the business to an extremity before we get near land. Remember, my lady, 'tis not your own honor alone you have to consider, though that be paramount to all, but the peace of Sir Bartlemy and," adds I, with an effort, "your poor lover, Sir Harry. Wherefore, for their sakes, must we fight this villain with his own weapons—meeting subtlety with subtlety; and for some little while, if you may subdue your proud spirit, it will be well to let him opine you will in time come round to his way of thinking."

"I understand you, Benet," says she calmly. "You fear if he thinks my resolution invincible he may"—she paused, covering her face with her hands, and added, leaving a blank where she could not utter her thought—"before we reach Caracas."

"Yes, that is what I do fear," says I.

"I will do my best, Benet," says she, "to follow your guidance, which I see is wise and good. Yet, if I fail—if—if—"

"Nay, I know what you would say; and here," says I, dropping on my knees beside her—"here I swear that at your cry for help I will slay both him and you."

"And with equal sincerity, Benet, I promise you I will not give that signal for my death until it is needed."

There was no need to explain these words more fully. We both understood that her dishonor was alone to call for this sole remedy. And, still on my knees, I vowed that I also would not live to bear the memory of her fate.

CHAPTER XXII.

I RECKON TO HAVE MADE ONE ENEMY THE LESS, BUT DO FIND MYSELF MISTAKEN GRIEVOUSLY.

Lady Biddy returned to the other cabin, and there sat where she might be seen from the deck, the while she pretended to be vastly interested in her book, in order to beguile Rodrigues in his fool's hope; for surely to see her thus unconcerned must have led him to believe her passion of no great depth or sincerity.

Meanwhile, in the adjoining cabin, I revolved a thousand schemes in my head concerning our condition, which so engrossed my thoughts as all recollection of the trap-door found no place there.

But in the evening, when Lady Biddy came in with a portion of the victuals which had been laid out for her supper by the little blackguard boy, and I asked her if she had seen aught of Rodrigues, she replied that out of the corner of her eye she had perceived him once watching her.

"But," says she, "I know not but that he has some fresh device in mind, for there has been a great Afric negro past the window half a dozen times, and on each occasion he has grinned with his big mouth so that I am quite at a loss what to make of him."

I asked her to describe this fellow to me, which she did closely, telling me he was over six feet high and proportionate in girth, with a flat nose spread upon his shining black face, and a huge mouth projecting like any ape's.

By these tokens I recalled to mind such a blackamoor fighting beside Rodrigues at that time I first boarded the *Black Death*. But what this purpose might be in passing the cabin window and grinning at Lady Biddy perplexed me as greatly as it did her, until of a sudden I bethought me of the attempt to enter the cabin in the night, and of the boy unbolting the trap.

"Did you see him at any time in company with the little wretch who waits on you?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Lady Biddy. "Indeed from his handing a dish to the boy I am disposed to believe he is the cook."

This so strengthened my suspicions that I could make no reply; for though I would fain have spared Lady Biddy any further addition to her anxiety, yet could I see no way of concealing this new peril from her without adding to her danger.

"Do you not think, Benet," says she presently, "that there is some new design of Rodrigues in this?"

"Nay," says I, "I am rather disposed to believe that this is some new enemy your beauty has created, and that this heathen negro has a mind to possess you before his master."

She shuddered, and sank down as if overwhelmed with this new horror.

Then I told her of the attempt to enter the cabin by night, and of the boy's villainy, showing her the hatch straightway.

"However," says I, "be assured that you run no greater risk from him than from the other villain. But I must beg you to repose as best you may in the big cabin to-night, and leave this chamber to me and the negro. We must rid ourselves of our enemies one at a time, with God's help."

"Surely you do not intend to let him enter by that trap-door, Benet?"

"Yes," says I, "that way must he come to the end he deserves. God knows I have no taste to the taking of life; but this wretch seeks our undoing; not we his. In self-defense I must kill him."

"But may you not as well foil him by shooting the bolt of the trap-door, Benet?"

"No," says I, "for that will only lead him to seek other means which we may not be prepared to frustrate. With a rope he may let himself down into the gallery beyond your cabin."

"I will run that risk," says she, "rather than you shall jeopardize your life for me. You will still be at hand to fulfill your promise, whether my enemy be this black or Rodrigues. At the worst we can but die."

"Ay, that is true," says I, transported with delight at this dear girl's concern for my safety; "but we must endeavor for the best rather than await the worst, and I make no doubt but that all will go well if you let me have my way. Nay, you must," I added, firmly.

And this firmness taking effect on her judgment (for women respect nothing so much as decision in a man), she consented to do as I directed.

When night fell she bolted the door of the outer cabin, drew her blinds, lowered the wick of the lamp till it shed but a mere glimmer, and sought repose on the sofett, though little disposed to sleep.

Meanwhile, having drawn the bolt of the hatch and returned the carpet to its place, I knelt down beside it with my knife in my hand, and no mercy in my heart.

Again this night was pitch dark, though it rained not, so that no light came into the cabin, and I could see nothing whatever save a thin thread of light under the betwixt door, and that but dim because of the lamp being low in the next cabin. But if my eyes were useless to me, my ears served me well, and no sound in the ship escaped me; yet I heard nothing of importance for many hours, as it seemed to me. A long while it must have been, for several times I had to shift my position because of being cramped in my legs by kneeling so long in one position.

At length an unusual sound (but very slight) reached my ear, and putting my head to the floor, I did distinctly hear the creak of wood, such as a ladder might make under the weight of a heavy body. Then, lifting my head and tightening my muscles, I grasped my knife, and prepared for the stroke.

Presently a fresh sound warned me that my enemy had come to the trap; but whether he had it opened or not I could not tell for the darkness, so that I was forced to reach forward with my left hand to feel whether the hatch was up or down.

The floor was still level.

I waited, trusting to my ears to tell me by the grating of the carpet on the edge of the hatch when it was raised. Yet heard I never a sound for his great circumspection, though expecting it for half an hour at least, as I judge; so that in the end, thinking I had been mistaken as to the sound I had heard at first, or that the wretch at the last moment had gone from his design, I stretched forth my left hand once more to feel the floor. But, lo! instead of touching the carpet as I thought to do, my hand fell plump on the negro's head, as I knew to my certainty by the short, wiry curls that distinguished his hair from other men's.

I did not hesitate for one moment, but clutching his hair firmly with my left hand, I stabbed my knife down where I thought his neck might be.

I knew I had not missed him, for I felt my knife scrape along a bone, and his warm blood gush over my hand, yet where I could not tell.

Without a cry (Heaven be praised!) he fell. Nor could I (having thrown my whole might on him) help but fall with him; so down I went, heels over head through the hatchway, but happily by the incline of the steps below, and striking on the negro's carcase when I got to the bottom, I escaped this bout with no more injury than a scraped shin and a bruised elbow. My chief concern was that the noise of our fall had alarmed some of the ship's company; and getting quickly on my feet I listened for a minute in terrible suspense.

Then from above I heard Lady Biddy whisper, anxiously, "Benet! Benet!"

"All's well—all's well!" I answered, softly. "Go back to the cabin and move about that the watch may think you made the noise."

This she did, leaving the betwixt door open, and raising the light of the lamp, as I could see by the square patch above, where the light gleamed faintly through the hatchway.

Casting my eyes around that I might, if possible, find out my position, I spied a little lantern not far off, hidden away between two barrels. And a perilous thing it seemed to place it there, for at a glance I perceived that these were barrels of powder, and many other like barrels were ranged along that side. But seamen, by being constantly exposed to danger, do get to be wondrous reckless and foolhardy, and none more so than these pirates.

Taking away the lantern and lifting it high, I saw that the walls were hung and fitted with muskets, swords, pikes, and all sorts of weapons, whereby it was made clear to me that I had pitched down into the ship's armory. Further, this explained the reason of there being a way of communication with the captain's cabin; for in case of mutiny (which pirates must always look to encounter), Rodrigues could close the armory from within, and provision himself and his followers for their defense of the roundhouse or coach.

From this store I thought it not amiss to furnish myself with a good sheath-dagger in place of my jack-knife, which either I had not drawn from the negro after stabbing him, or had dropped from my hand in falling down from above. As I went to take the weapon I wanted from the wall, my foot kicked against something round on the ground, and, looking down, I perceived there a pile of hand-grenades, and this at once put me in mind how I might, at any moment, destroy the ship with every soul it contained. For by casting one of those grenades amongst the powder, such an explosion would be caused as should rend every timber asunder, and in one moment blow all living creatures from the ship into eternity.

I took up a grenade, and, examining it, found that it was properly fitted with a fusee; so, turning it about in my hand, I reflected how sure and quick it would be to our destruction, and how preferable to any death I might deal with a blade. Finally my heart sickening at the thought of having to plunge a knife in Lady Biddy's bosom, I resolved that if her escape from shame could only be wrought by death, I would use this grenade, that we should perish together at the same instant.

This cogitation put the intention of arming myself with a short dagger quite out of my mind, and being now beset with a fear lest Lady Biddy should be alarmed by my absence, I hastened to return, carrying the lantern in one hand and my grenade in the other.

I had light enough to descry the steps that led to the trap-door, and thither I made my way. Presently I stumbled against the body of the negro. He lay doubled up betwixt the side of the steps and a pile of cannon-balls, and from his position I surmised that he had rolled over in falling and struck head first upon the balls, which alone would have been death to any ordinary man.

When I got back to the cabin, and fastened down the trap, I set my grenade carefully under the cot, and by the side of it the lantern, lowering the wick (for it was fitted with an oil lamp in lieu of a candle), until there was left but the smallest light possible. Burning at this little pace, I reckoned the lamp would go some days, with attention, and I prayed it might last till we reached a port where we might escape; for without it to ignite the fusee my grenade would be of no use.

While I was yet arranging those matters, Lady Biddy came to me.

"You are not hurt, Benet?" were the first words she whispered.

"No, Lady Biddy," says I; "but you have one enemy the less."

She made no reply, but rested her hand for support upon the bed, as if the thought of this death sickened her.

I slipped my right hand behind me lest she should see the black patch which, even in that faint light, I perceived the negro's blood had stained my hand with. Then, to turn her thoughts, I asked her if any notice had been taken by the watch of the noise made by my falling down the hatchway.

"No," says she; and then after a few minutes' silence, "Oh, Benet, I wish it were all over."

"Courage, Lady Biddy, courage," says I. "You are not used to give way in the face of danger."

"No," says she; "'tis when the danger is past my courage sinks."

But the danger was not passed, as was presently made evident. For in that space of silence which succeeded her last words—a silence which was scarce broken by the water through which the ship was cutting—a groan from below reached my ears, and the next instant a creaking of the steps leading up to the trap, with something like the low, vengeful growling of a tiger.

I sprang to the corner to make sure that I had secured the trap, for I felt sure that the negro was coming up to take his revenge upon us.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW RODRIGUES GOT AT THE TRUTH, AND A LIE INTO THE BARGAIN.

Hearing these sounds, I say, I was assured that the negro did intend to burst open the trap and take revenge for the wound I had dealt him, and I have good reason to believe that this was his intent and purpose, for standing on the hatch to lend strength to the bolt that secured it, I felt it move beneath my feet; nay, the very boards cracked under the force of his broad shoulders against it.

But this prodigious effort was too much for the strength of the wounded wretch. Presently we heard a hoarse cry of rage, and then a heavy fall, as if he had yielded to a faintness and pitched down once more to the ground.

After that we heard no movement below, nor any sound whatever; neither was any further attempt made to raise the trap.

Seeing that Lady Biddy was very much overwrought by this excitement and her previous want of rest, I implored her to return to the other cabin and seek repose—pointing out that we had no more to fear from the black, and promising that, should anything happen to the contrary, I would not fail to let her know. And listening at length to my persuasions, she went back as I bade her, lowered the wick of her lamp, and did, after awhile, as she told me in the morning, unconsciously fall asleep. For my own part, I spent the rest of that night seated on the hatch, never once closing my eyes or relaxing my watch.

In the morning Lady Biddy, coming to me, whispered that search was being made for the negro; indeed, I could with my own ears hear the men bellowing in different parts, "Tonga! Tonga!" which was the name of this fellow.

I bade Lady Biddy go back again to her cabin, and seem to know nothing of what this search meant.

Soon after she had returned there, Rodrigues comes to her, and, with a vast show of respect and consideration, begged she would have patience to wait a little while for her breakfast, as the cook was not at his post, and could not be found.

"I remarked his manner was strange all day yesterday," says he, "and it is as like as not he has thrown himself overboard in a fit of madness, produced by the heat of the sun. However," he adds, "this accident shall not interfere with your convenience, for I will dress your victuals with my own hands rather than they shall be ill-served." And with this polite speech he makes his *congé* and leaves my lady.

At noon, when the boy had served the dinner, Rodrigues came again to apologize for the quality of the food, saying that they had run short of provisions with having been so long at sea, but that he hoped to provide her with fresh meat and fruit before twenty-four hours, as land was in sight, and he counted to cast anchor the following morning.

Lady Biddy replied as graciously as she could to one whom she so loathed and despised, and in this (despite her natural repugnance to hypocrisy or deceit) her wit was aided by the comfort of this news, and the knowledge that our chance of escape would be greatly aided by lulling Rodrigues' suspicion.

He said not a word about marriage, and indeed behaved himself with becoming civility; and to make him believe that he had succeeded in producing a more favorable impression on herself, Lady Biddy begged him, when he was going, to leave the door wide open that she might have the benefit of the air.

About two o'clock, when all the company were resting (for in these latitudes it is impossible to work while the sun is in the meridian), Lady Biddy came into the little cabin, and with great glee told me what had passed and how we were nearing land.

"But," says she, "if we come to an anchor in the morning, will it be possible to escape in broad daylight?"

"No," says I; "that we can not, unless we should get away when all are taking their noon rest. But there is no necessity to run great peril by haste. Water, I doubt not, is what is much needed. As Rodrigues said nothing about reaching a port, it is pretty evident he is running to land for the immediate refreshment of his company. They will not be content getting on shore to embark again at once even if they succeed in finding a freshet for the filling of their barrels. Any way I feel certain we shall not lift anchor again for twenty-four hours, and that will give us the night to make our escape in."

Satisfied with this assurance, Lady Biddy returned to the next cabin, after bathing her sweet hands and face, leaving me to turn over in my mind a hundred schemes for our deliverance; yet none could I hit on but what seemed desperate in the extreme.

Nothing occurred to disturb Lady Biddy's repose the succeeding night, to her great refreshment no less to my satisfaction.

Shortly after daybreak there was much bustle on deck, and presently I heard the anchor drop, whereupon, as if the moment of our release were come, my heart bounded with joy, and I scraped at the wall to awake Lady Biddy. By her quick reply, I knew that the sound had aroused her, and she had divined its meaning.

Then there arose a great hallooing and shouting amongst the men, who seemed no less pleased than we, though from another cause. But there was yet much to be done before a boat could be sent ashore. However, the fellows set about their

work with a will, and now there was nothing but singing and laughing over it, whereas before they had gone about their business in sullen silence.

It may have been about eight o'clock when the merriment on board was of a sudden hushed, and Lady Biddy, looking from the door to see what this might mean, perceived a seaman coming up the hatchway in the fore part of the ship, with a jar and a bundle in one hand, and dragging the cook's boy up by the hair of his head with the other. Being come on deck he lead the urchin, crying lustily, towards Rodrigues, who was standing not far from the roundhouse.

"I've watched the little hound as you bid me, your honor," says the man, addressing Rodrigues; "and I ketched him sneaking down below with these here, which he dropped when he sees me, whereby I knowed he was up to no good."

"What are those?" asks Rodrigues, indicating the jar and the bundle.

"A noggin o' water, your honor," says the seaman; "and," he adds (undoing the clout), "a mess o' wittles. Axed me not to tell you, your honor."

"Whom were you taking those things to?" asks Rodrigues.

"No one, your honor," cries the boy, whimpering. "I was a-going to eat 'em myself."

"Whom were you taking them to?" Rodrigues repeats, in the same even tone.

The boy looked at him, and, clasping his wretched little hands, cried for mercy.

"Overboard with him," says Rodrigues.

A couple of men seized hold of him.

"Spare me! spare me!" cries the child. "I'll tell if you'll only spare me."

"Out with it!" says Rodrigues.

"I was carrying 'em to Tonga."

Rodrigues hereupon nodded to a group of fellows, who, taking the boy for their guide, went forward and so down the hatchway below. Meanwhile, the captain turned upon his heel, so that he faced the window where Lady Biddy was watching, and she observed that there was a malicious smile on his wicked face, as though he was satisfied to find his surmise justified. And while he was walking towards the coach with his head bent, he raised his eyes, yet without lifting his head, and under his black brows cast a strange glance at my lady.

Presently those men who had gone below returned, bringing with them the boy and the negro. And this man was fearful to look on because of the mess of dried blood upon him, an open wound in his shoulder, and the sickness of fear in his face as he was haled before Rodrigues. Yet, for all his fear, there was rage of passion in his eye as he caught sight of Lady Biddy, and also when he looked at the boy, who shrank away from him in dread.

"You look sick, Tonga. What has ailed you?" asked Rodrigues, as if he looked to get a satisfactory answer.

Tonga nodded, and in a hoarse voice told, with such queer speech as negroes use, how the heat had made him giddy, so that he fell down the hatch into the hold, and lay there unable to move.

"You seem to have fallen on something that ought not to be in the hold," says Rodrigues, going close up to him and looking at his wound, the fellow being stark naked to the waist. "It looks as if it had been done with a knife. How's that?"

The negro swore he knew not how he had come by this wound.

"You can not tell me?" says Rodrigues, airily.

Tonga shook his head.

"You were so giddy you knew not what happened."

Tonga nodded, grinning, yet with little taste to mirth, but uneasily.

"Well," says Rodrigues, "we must hear what your little friend can tell us about it. Come, my boy—what do you know about this business?"

The boy, shivering in every limb (as with a quartan), glanced at the black, who returned a wicked look of warning.

"I know naught, your honor," cries the little fellow, "save that he called to me from below for meat and drink."

"Nothing else?"

"Naught, your honor."

Then Rodrigues says a word to two of the seamen, who straightway ran to the fore end and came back, bearing a long plank betwixt them; and this they set athwart the bulwarks, a little less than midway of its length, and with its longer end resting on a

chest that stood over that way.

"Get up!" says Rodrigues.

The boy, not knowing what was toward, and mightily perplexed, did as he was bidden, and so stood up facing Rodrigues. But one of the seamen, cursing him for his want of manners—as he put it—twisted him round so that he faced the sea.

"Walk!" cried Rodrigues, when the boy was thus positioned.

Whereupon the boy, still unwitting, walked forward towards the bulwarks and there stopped.

"Walk!" cries Rodrigues, a little louder than heretofore.

Then the perplexed boy made another step forward, but seeing that if he walked further he must overbalance the board, and so shoot into the sea below, he stopped again.

"Walk!" cries Rodrigues again, this time whipping out his sword.

Then the boy, seeing the meaning of this, fell upon his knees, crying for pity, and telling all he knew and had hitherto concealed—to wit, that Tonga did make him draw the bolt of the trap in the captain's cabin that morning he went for his silver-braided coat, and that it was from the armory and not from the hold the black cried to him for drink, and also that he had helped him to get down in the hold, and dared not do otherwise for fear of his life.

"You hear this, Tonga," says Rodrigues. "Now will you tell me how you got that cut?"

"She did it!" roars the negro, with the ferocity of any tiger, pointing with his hand towards Lady Biddy, while flames of fire seemed to flash in his eyes. "She did it!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

LADY BIDDY SORELY PUT TO IT WHETHER TO TELL THE TRUTH OR HOLD HER TONGUE.

Without turning to see whom the negro indicated, or what effect this charge made upon her, Rodrigues said:

"That is a lie. No woman's hand struck that blow." Then, turning to his boatswain, he gave him instructions to pipe the whole company together and see that no man was wanting. This the boatswain did, and when all the men were ranged across the deck in a line with the plank, on which the wretched boy still knelt, crying bitterly, Tonga standing before them, and Rodrigues facing him sword in hand, the latter spoke:

"Tonga would have us believe he was struck down by a woman," says he. "What say you?"

The men, as much to support their captain as of their own conviction, shook their heads and cried "No!"

"Then," says Rodrigues, "it follows that one of you struck the blow, which, by those rules to which all have put their hands, is a treacherous offence, to be punished with death. Which of you did it?"

To this no one made reply, but all stood mumchance, spying their fellows to see if any did bear guilt in their face; but all looked innocent of this offense, as Rodrigues, with his discriminating eye, could well perceive. When he had looked them all over in silence, waiting an answer, he said, "Not a soul leaves this ship, though you go dry another fortnight, till the truth is found out. I give Tonga into your hands. Employ what means you choose—short of taking his life—to get a true confession from him."

Then, turning again towards the boy, he cried, "Stand up! limb of the devil—up with you!"

The poor little wretch stood up for fear of the glittering sword, but still with his hands clasped, and the tears running down his cheeks.

"Walk!" again cries Rodrigues; "there is no place in this ship for a liar."

The child turned his face to the sea with a pitiful moan.

Then Lady Biddy, seeing his sorrowful case, and that he was to be forced to his death, was moved to desperation by the passionate pity in her heart, and so bursting from the cabin she ran forward to save him. But it was too late; the child, seeing no escape from death by the sword or the sea, and being mayhap tempted to the latter because it looked so fair and cool, with a shrill cry of despair ran suddenly forward, so that, the plank tilting up, he was plunged headlong down into the waves. At the sight of this cruel business, Lady Biddy stopped midway in the deck and covered her face with her hands, while that last despairing cry of the child's was echoed back from her own compassionate breast.

Of all this I saw nothing, being within the little cabin; yet I was conscious that something unusual was going forward in the ship by a sound or two that came to my ear as I stood by the panel-door. Thus, as I stood straining my senses to make out the meaning of these sounds, I heard a quick movement in the next chamber, and scarce a moment afterwards that pitiful cry of Lady Biddy's which I have spoken of. Then, heedless of my danger, and that I had no weapon for her defense but the hands God gave me, I tore open the door and leapt into the next cabin, expecting nothing less than to find my lady at the feet of Rodrigues. Discovering no such matter, but spying Lady Biddy standing alone a few paces from the door, I was much taken aback, yet not so much but that I at once recognized my folly and imprudence in thus exposing myself; seeing that, as luck would have it, I was still unobserved—having gone no further into the cabin than enabled me to catch sight of my lady where she stood close beyond the outer door—I drew back at once within the little cabin.

Being there, I stood irresolute, not knowing what to do for the best for the tumult of my mind. For I could make out nothing of what I had seen; yet was I pretty sure that a climax was at hand—the more so because I presently heard Rodrigues speaking to Lady Biddy in the next chamber. At length, making up my mind to be ready for the worst, and not to be taken by surprise in the manner I have shown, I went to the lantern which stood under the cot, and turned up the wick so that it gave a good flame, laid the grenade beside it, ready to fire the fuse at any moment, and then going to the corner turned back the strip of carpet, and drew back the bolt of the trap.

These preparations being made, I returned to the little door and leaned my ear against it, and then hearing no sound within I went to that part of the wall over against where my lady did use to sit, and made the usual signal to her by scratching a little upon the panel. To this she replied, not cheerfully as before, but feebly, as though she had lost heart. Yet it was a comfort to me to know she was there and Rodrigues gone.

Now must I go back somewhat.

As Lady Biddy stood with her hands to her face, shutting out the sight of that heartless cruelty put upon the child who had waited upon her (and to whom she had shown many a kindness, giving him sweetmeats from her table and the like), Rodrigues comes up to her.

"Why, madam," says he, "do you take the death of this little traitor to heart? Sure, I counted to have pleased you by revenging the injury to your person he did his best to further. Be comforted, I pray you." With this he would have laid his hand upon her arm, but that she shrank from him in loathing, and turning about returns to her cabin.

"The boy is at peace," says Rodrigues, walking by her side. "And is it not better he should die now rather than grow up to be a hardened villain? May I fetch you a glass of wine to restore your spirits?" he asks when they were come into the cabin, and Lady Biddy had sunk down upon the sofett.

She shook her head, yet without trusting herself to look upon him.

Fetching a sigh, Rodrigues seated himself near her, and says he:

"Doubtless you think me cold-blooded and heartless; yet I do assure you I am not. But while I command this ship I must exercise severity, for only by inspiring fear can I obtain the respect and obedience of my company. When I am no longer a pirate you will see that my nature is different. Heaven knows I shall be enchanted to abandon this horrid career—to quit for ever a lawless life, and give example of humane sentiments. It is in your power to make that hand an instrument of charity and mercy which, hitherto, you have seen exercised only in necessary severity; and this reflection will, I trust, reconcile you to our speedy union."

With this hint he leaves her—to my lady's satisfaction.

Meanwhile the company, after conferring together, laid hands on Tonga, vowing that if he would not willingly confess who had stabbed him they would certainly avail themselves of their captain's permission and force him to do so by torture. But the black could do no more than repeat what he had told already—viz., that he had been stabbed and thrown down into the armory as he was entering the cabin above, adding that if Lady Biddy had not struck the blow he knew not who had, for there was no light to see what hand it was.

"Well," says the boatswain, "you'll have to name one of us, that's certain, for the comfort of the rest. But mark you, be careful not to name any who can prove his innocence, for if you play us a scurvy trick of that sort we'll burn the soles off your feet."

As he made no reply, for fear of subjecting himself to the horrid torture they threatened, they took a cord that ran through a block at the yard-arm, and with one end they bound his wrists together behind his back. When he was thus secured, they pulled upon the other end of this same cord till he swung over the bulwarks and hung over the sea.

By keeping his muscles tense and his wrists well down against the small of his back, Tonga hung in mid-air for some time without suffering. But gradually the effort to keep his position increased as the weight of his great body inclining forward taxed the muscles of his arms, as you shall find if you do but try such an experiment. Presently one of those who held the other end of the line hitched over a spar, growing impatient of his endurance, gave the cord a sudden jerk, whereby the black's wrists were wrenched away from his loins, so that now his muscles were powerless, as one may say, while his vast bulk, hanging thus at an angle with his wrists, threatened to drag his arms out of their sockets.

This torment the black endured for some while in peace; but at length, when another jerk was given to the cord, he uttered a great yell of rage and agony.

Hearing that terrible cry, Lady Biddy could no longer endure to witness such suffering, and again ran from her cabin, bidding the seamen in mercy to desist from his further torture.

At this moment Rodrigues came on deck from below, whither he had descended upon quitting Lady Biddy.

"You wish Tonga to be relieved from his pain," asks he.

"Yes, yes," cries she; "don't you see that his arms are being torn from his body?"

"His plight is not so bad as that," says Rodrigues. "However, if you wish to save him from his discomfort you may do so by a single word; though 'tis a thankless service on your part, for if he were allowed free use of his deliverance he would employ it to destroy you."

"No matter," cries Lady Biddy, as another yell reached her ear. "Let him go, I say."

"You shall be obeyed immediately if you will give yourself the trouble to step this way and answer one question."

Saying this, Rodrigues turned toward the roundhouse; but instead of going into the cabin as before, he ascended the steps to the poop deck, over which there hung a tent of fine canvas.

Without regarding whither she went, Lady Biddy accompanied him, being distracted with the ringing of the negro's cry in her ear, and concerned only for his release.

Being come upon this deck, Rodrigues, standing in the gangway and facing my lady, said:

"Lady Biddy, the man hanging from the yard-arm has been strung up in order that I may know who stabbed him. I must get that information for my own safety and the safety of my company, for the hand that struck Tonga might strike me. You see, I am quite reasonable in the view I take of things."

"Hark!" cried Lady Biddy, as another scream came from the black.

"Yes, he is in terrible agony," says Rodrigues, "and he will continue to suffer while I am ignorant of the one fact I want to know. He will be taken down the moment I know who stabbed him. Will you tell me?"

Now my lady was in a sore strait, for she could not tell him it was I, and yet by not telling him must she prolong the terrible torment of the black.

"He must hang there till he dies of his pain," continues Rodrigues (after watching my lady's embarrassed face for a minute), "if I am kept ignorant. On the other hand, I promise you he shall be amply recompensed for his pangs if I find out."

Lady Biddy heard this, yet little did she reckon what Rodrigues intended for the black's recompense.

"Suppose I did it with my own hand," says she, eagerly.

Rodrigues fetched from his pocket a mariner's jack-knife, and says he, "Is this yours, madam?"

"No," says she, looking at it in perplexity.

"You don't know the look of it?" he asks.

She shook her head with misgiving.

"Then," says he, "I can not suppose that you did it with your own hand, for this is the knife with which Tonga was stabbed. Come, Lady Biddy, if you know who did this thing, why not tell at once?"

"How should I know?" cries Lady Biddy.

"Because he is your friend," says Rodrigues, slowly.

"There is the whole of my company," adds he, waving his hand toward the deck. "Not one of those fellows would have moved a hand to save you from the lust of Tonga. The only one on this ship, except myself, who would preserve you is" (dropping his voice and leaning forward) "down there"; and saying this he pointed with his finger to the cabin beneath them.

CHAPTER XXV.

LADY BIDDY IS SET ASHORE, BUT LITTLE MERCY THEREIN.

Hearing these words, Lady Biddy was thrown into such disorder that even had Rodrigues been of dull perception he might have read in her distracted countenance justification of his suspicions. Stepping aside, he fetches a seat placed there for his convenience, and sets it down beside Lady Biddy, who, for want of strength to stand up, sank into it. Then going to the rail, he calls to his boatswain, bidding him to let down Tonga, as he had discovered who it was that stabbed him.

"But," adds he, "no man is to stir from his post till he has my further command."

Whereupon the black was lowered down and hauled upon deck, where he lay for some time helpless and supine.

While this was doing, Rodrigues turns again to Lady Biddy, who was now come to herself again somewhat, and says he:

"You have shown a tender heart for the boy who betrayed you, and the negro who would have shown you no pity. What will you do for the man who saved you?"

Lady Biddy dropped her chin upon her bosom, and clasped her hands in silence, feeling how helpless she was, and how incapable of coping with the difficulty which now beset her.

"That he is courageous and strong he has given us ample proof," continues Rodrigues; "but the strength and vigor of a lion can not save him from the wrath of my company. I have but to tell them an enemy lies hid in the cabin below, and they will seize him and put him to greater torture than the black has endured. They will tear him limb from limb before your eyes, and even I could not save him from that horrid death."

"But I could," cries Lady Biddy, starting up. "Ay, and I will. Lift your voice to those heartless tigers below, and I will lift mine to him. Ere they can move a pace he will be beyond their violence, and I yours."

Rodrigues looked at her steadfastly through his half-closed eyelids, as if to make sure this threat was not idle; nay, by a contemptuous smile he provoked her to give him a further assurance. And this she did, being greatly wrought.

"We are prepared for the worst. I have but to cry to him for help, and he will fire the gunpowder below. Our fate will be no worse than yours, so take heed."

Saying this she stepped quickly back, placing the chair between herself and Rodrigues, that no treacherous blow from him might deprive her of the power to save me from the fate he threatened.

For an instant Rodrigues seemed taken aback by this revelation, but recovering his self-command, he says, with his usual smoothness and subtlety:

"Madam, I am greatly obliged for this warning, though it was quite unnecessary, as you will see for yourself if you consider the matter calmly. In the first place, I am not likely to do anything which may cause you to cry for help; and, in the second, I mean no mischief to your friend. Had that been my purpose, I could have secretly instructed my company to search the cabin and secure our dangerous foe the moment I discovered he was there. By sparing him, I designed to strengthen my claim upon your consideration—I hope still to merit your gratitude. To that end, as you perceive, I have ordered my company to stand to their posts."

In this there was an appearance of truth which Lady Biddy could not see through; so that it had the effect of calming her spirit somewhat, which was what Rodrigues did, doubtless, aim at.

"You must by this time know," he continued, "that I am a man who, having set his mind upon the achievement of an object, braves all things to that end. I never yet abandoned my purpose while there remained a single means of attaining to it. I have set my mind on abandoning this desperate career and marrying you, and to accomplish this design I am prepared to sacrifice everything; nay, I will go so far as to enrich the man who saved you from the negro. Listen!"

He made a step forward, but Lady Biddy, still doubtful of his intent (for none could look upon his face without seeing "villain" writ there), also drew back a step. Rodrigues, taking no notice of this act of prudence (save by a smile), set his hands on the back of the seat, as if that had been his sole purpose, and leaning forward in an easy, careless manner, continues:

"The boats lie alongside ready to carry my men ashore for their refreshment. I will send every one of my company away, leaving none on board save you and myself and *our* friend below. When the coast is clear, you and I will embark in my own boat, and we will abandon the ship to him" (pointing below). "As you see, there is not a ripple on the water; with a couple of hours' exertion I shall bring you to a village whence we may be transported by land to the town where I shall give you a home worthy of any princess. Will you accept my offer?"

"No," cries Lady Biddy, without taking an instant to consider.

"I will give you an hour to reflect," says Rodrigues.

"Nothing can change my decision, do what you will."

"You are prepared to destroy every soul in this ship—even the friend to whom you owe your life—rather than accept the terms I offer? You realize what you threaten?"

"Yes," says she; "not I, but you, must answer to God for the destruction of our lives."

He smiled scornfully, as if that consideration were the least of his troubles; then he bent his head, and, knitting his brows, remained in thought for a while. Suddenly raising his head, as if his final decision was made, he says:

"You compel me to abandon the fondest hope I have cherished? Be it so. Now to undo this business, and forget my folly."

Turning about, he calls to the boatswain to have his barge manned and brought to the ship's landing-steps.

"I must ask you, madam," says he, again addressing my lady, "to leave this ship. I must think now only of my own safety and the welfare of my company."

Not foreseeing her danger, but only transported with joy to think she was to be delivered from her captivity, Lady Biddy replied that she demanded nothing better.

"Your effects will be landed afterwards. I doubt if you would care for me to send my men into your cabin for them at the present moment."

"But," says Lady Biddy, thinking of me, and then she stopped.

"I understand what is in your thoughts. You are concerned for your friend; so am I. I cannot answer for his life if my men find him. They would insist upon his death in return for the injury inflicted upon Tonga. Therefore must he wait until the company is landed and gone in search of water."

At this moment the boatswain came to say that the boat was prepared.

"You will take this lady to the shore, and see that no injury is offered her—not a word uttered that may offend her," says Rodrigues; and then stepping back, that she might have freedom to pass, he takes off his hat and makes her a prodigious fine bow. Yet Lady Biddy hesitated, fearing treachery to me; and still more might she have feared it if her spirits had been quite composed, and her judgment in a condition to weigh all that Rodrigues had said.

"What have you to fear?" says he, speaking low. "What harm could the most treacherous wretch inflict with impunity? If you have told the truth—which I do not doubt—a cry from you will insure the destruction of all you leave in this ship. Your cry from the shore would sound as clearly in this still air as from here. Think what you will of me, but believe that I am not a fool. Farewell!"

Hoping for the best, seeing no better course open to her, and yet troubled with misgivings, Lady Biddy descended the side and took her place in the barge. Then in silence the men pulled her ashore. Yet did they look keenly one at the other, as if expecting some merry turn of this business—one thrusting his tongue in his cheek, a second winking his eye, and a third hawking as if he had a rheum.

However, they said not one word, and having set Lady Biddy on shore very tenderly, they shoved off and returned to the ship.

Now, not knowing which way to turn nor what to do, for her position being so unexpected, and feeling like one set alone in another world, Lady Biddy rested her hand on the tree by which she stood, and in a kind of maze watched the boat returning to the ship.

Then she began to wonder how long it would be ere the men would be dispersed and I should come to her, and what means we should find of getting to that town Rodrigues had spoken of.

The men left the boat and went up on board, and still Lady Biddy watched, as if she had but just woke from her sleep, and was dazed (as she told me); but of a sudden a great shout burst upon her ear, and as quickly it flashed upon her intelligence that a false trick had been put upon her, which she might have foreseen had she been as subtle as Rodrigues, which (thanks be to God) she was not. Then for the first time it occurred to her that while she was being carried to the shore Rodrigues might send part of his company below to take the powder from the armory, or to be prepared with muskets to shoot me dead the moment I lifted the trap.

And now hearing this shout she was convinced that precautions had been taken to prevent the blowing up of the ship, and the men were rushing into the cabin to take me.

But this was not the worst. As she strained her eyes, as if to pierce the side of the ship and know my fate, she perceived a boat shoot from the further side of the ship and turn towards her. For a moment she believed that I had contrived to escape, for there was but one man in the boat; but looking more narrowly she perceived, to her horror, that the man was Tonga the negro; and coming towards her he raised a terrible yell of savage joy and triumph.

Rodrigues, true to his word, had offered the black a reward for the pain he had been put to; and now, as he came on exulting to satiate his lust and vengeance, my poor Lady Biddy screamed aloud to me.

But it was too late; and Lady Biddy, feeling she was now most surely undone, could not even cry again for help.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW I GOT AWAY FROM THE VILE PIRATE AND SETTLED TONGA HIS BUSINESS.

Seeing nothing but impenetrable thickets on one hand, and the sea on the other, and no means of escape either this way or that from the raging savage, Lady Biddy, I say, did give herself up for lost; and so, falling on her knees, she prayed the Almighty to take her life there and then, that she might be saved from the loathsome passion of the negro. Yet was her case not so bad as to call for this last remedy neither, as I shall presently show.

In great commotion of mind I stood in the little cabin with the grenade in my hand and the lamp burning steadily at my feet, prepared to play the part of the destroyer, while still cherishing the faint flickering hope that my lot rather was to be that of the preserver.

Thus I waited an incredible length of time (as it seemed to me), until, my anxiety becoming no longer tolerable, I scratched again upon the wall for a signal to Lady Biddy.

Then getting no answer, I ventured again to the panel-door and peeped through. The big cabin was empty; nor could I spy through the further door any sign of her, but only the ship's company drawn across the deck, with Tonga lying prone before them.

But at a glance I perceived that most of the men were looking up towards the deck over my head, and then catching a faint sound from thence, which my eager intelligence made out to be my lady's voice, I was no longer in doubt as to her whereabouts.

At this point I heard Rodrigues call to his boatswain to man the boat, which he speedily set about to do. Now, while these fellows were thus busily occupied, I saw my chance to get out on to the gallery unperceived through the little door there, which had been set open to let a current of air through. So creeping low and nimble as any cat I crossed the space that was open to observation from the deck (without being seen, thanks be to God), and that way got me on to the quarter gallery.

Yet what I was to do there, I knew not; still, it was a comfort to change my place, for any shift seems for the best when one is tormented with apprehension.

After another tedious spell I heard the oars splash, and presently, to my complete amazement, I caught sight of the barge, with eight or ten lusty men in it, pulling towards the shore with all their will, and Lady Biddy seated on one of the thwarts alone.

I withdrew cautiously to that end of the gallery where the bulk of the ship did somewhat conceal me from the rowers in the boat, whose faces were towards the ship (yet not so far but that, crouching down, I might watch what came of this business), and thence I saw them set Lady Biddy on shore. At first I thought that this was but an indulgence of Rodrigues, that she might refresh herself while the men were getting water; but this notion was put out of my head the next minute by seeing the fellows shove off and return towards the ship, leaving her there alone. Had she told Rodrigues all, and was the boat returning to fetch me, I asked myself, or was there some wicked design to leave her there alone?

Being better minded to trust myself than Rodrigues, I made up my mind to swim to the shore, which was no great matter, the distance being half a mile at the outside, and the sea very fair and smooth; so climbing over the rail, I dropped from that gallery into the lower one which projected beyond it. And luckily for me I did so at that time, for scarcely had I come to my feet when I heard a mighty uproar on the deck, with the clatter of arms (which, doubtless, had been silently furnished for the men's use from the armory while Lady Biddy was being carried to the shore), and then much hallooing and shouting in that part of the coach I had so fortunately got out of. Nay, I did hear one rascal come to the gallery door above and cry, as he looked out, that I was not there.

"Now," thinks I, "is my time to get out of this hornets' nest"; and so clambering over this rail as I had over the other, and recommending myself to Providence (for as like as not in such waters as these might be sharks or water serpents), I dropped down plumb into the water, and coming up again, struck out vigorously for the shore, keeping as low under water as I well could.

"Happily," thinks I, "they are looking for me elsewhere, so may I chance to escape this bout scot free"; and with this thought, added to the bewildering delightful expectation of being ere long beside Lady Biddy and at a safe distance from the tiger who sought my destruction, I pushed on with great speed, feeling no fatigue whatever, but only a great joy.

Then suddenly I heard a hoarse shout of triumph, which did for the moment lead me to think I had been perceived from the ship; but casting my eye around I spied on my right hand a skiff and Tonga in it, pulling the oars; yet feebly, because of his arms being wrenched as I have described.

'Twas a wonder he had not caught sight of me; but I think his eyes were chiefly occupied in glancing over his shoulder to see if the fair girl were trying to escape him, and truly, as the proverb runs, "One sees naught but the deer when one runs with the hounds."

As I caught sight of him he shifted his oars, which he had hitherto been pulling (and could, I take it, no longer do for the suffering of his arms), and standing up in the boat, with his face to the shore, he took to pushing the oars for his greater comfort. Thus was his back set towards me, so that, unseen and with very little ado, I overtook the boat, and laying hold of the sling at the stern, I let him pull me towards the shore, to his greater pain and exhaustion.

This maneuver did not serve me another turn, for against the black stern of the boat my dark head was indistinguishable from the ship, unless one did carefully examine with a spyglass; and doubtless by this time Rodrigues and his company, having found that I was no longer in the ship, were scanning the sea to know if I were there. That I had been in the cabin pretty recently, and that Lady Biddy had told him no more than the truth, Rodrigues might see full well by the burning lamp and the grenade I had left behind me.

At last the boat ran around, and, dropping my feet, I felt the sandy bottom. Then, glancing along the side, I saw my poor Lady Biddy kneeling beside a tree with her face hid in her hands, to shut out the sight of that horrid black, which did stir my entrails with hatred of him.

Yet I saw full well that I must not discover myself till I was got on firm ground, for a man up to his neck is powerless—though he have the heart of a lion—against another whose limbs are free to act. With a blow of an oar Tonga might have settled my business; and, knowing this, I kept still hid from him under the gunwale of the boat until he leapt out on to the sand.

Crouching down more like a tiger than a human being, he slowly went up the sandy slope, and to make the resemblance greater, a low growl of savage exultation came from his throat, and he drew up his arms, with all his fingers spread out, as if preparing to spring upon his poor helpless victim.

Quickly and yet silently I made my way out of the water and followed in his footsteps. Arms I had none, but presently, drawing near him, I spied a great stone half buried in the sand, and this I wrenched up at one tug, though it weighed, as I believe, over a quarter of a hundredweight, and was sucked down by the wet sand.

Hearing the sound that was made by the wet sand dropping from the stone, he turned about, and, catching sight of me, set up a fearful cry of rage; but it was the last cry he ever made, for I held the stone lifted over my head, and, dashing it forward with all the might of my body, I struck him full in the face with it, crushing in the bones and bursting the brains from his skull.

Then all was silent, save a faint cry of despair from Lady Biddy, who, daring not to uncover her eyes from the moment she saw the black on shore, thought that his cry of rage was intended for her, and that the crash which followed was but some preparation for her destruction.

I threw some sand over the bloody, formless thing that had been a human face the minute before, that the ghastly spectacle might not shock Lady Biddy, and then I went to her side softly over the sand.

Now did I fear to let Lady Biddy know that her enemy was dead and a deliverer at hand, lest by the sudden commotion of feelings I might unhinge her mind. For a moment I wondered how I should manage this business for the best, and then, my wits failing to help me, I yielded to the desire of my heart, and dropping on my knees by her side murmured with a true and devout heart:

"God be praised!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

OF OUR FURTHER ESCAPES, AND A STRATAGEM BY WHICH OUR ENEMIES WERE PUT TO GREAT DISCOMFORT.

Hearing these words, Lady Biddy did rouse herself up as from a dream, and seeing me kneeling by her side with bent head, and the negro lying at a distance quite still she gave a little scream of surprise, and then, clasping my folded hands in hers, fell to weeping and laughing out of all measure; but I knew not which was the more piteous to hear.

"You have saved me again. You good Benet—again saved!" cried she.

"Ay, Lady Biddy," says I. "Yet I am but the happy instrument of a Divine Grace; and you should think, not of me, but of Him whose servant I am."

These serious words had the effect I wished, for at once she grew calmer, and, ceasing to smile, did with all her heart pour out grateful thanks to Heaven. And never did holy man more devoutly join in heartfelt praise than I who was, as I may say, a sinner.

From this sweet communion we were aroused in a sudden and terrible manner. The thunder of a cannon smote our ears, and at the same moment a great splinter was torn out of the side of the tree, against which we knelt, by a ball. Yet we were not harmed thereby so much as a hair of our heads.

As we started to our feet we heard a great shout from the sea, and casting our eyes that way we perceived a couple of boats making for the shore as hard as ever the fellows within them could pull, so that we could not doubt but that Rodrigues had spied us from the ship, and sent his company in our pursuit.

"Now, Lady Biddy," says I, "if you have strength we must run for it."

"Ay," says she with alacrity, and no sign of her late weakness. "Whither you will, Benet."

With that she puts her little soft hand in mine, and so, like two children, we started to run along the sands. And well it was we were so prompt, for ere we had got a dozen yards another gun was fired from the ship, and this time charged with slug shot that scattered prodigiously, but, thanks be to God, did us no hurt in the world; at which I laughed aloud, and Lady Biddy joined her pretty mirth as gay as any peal of bells, so elated was she with our happy release.

Yet were we laughing ere we were out of the wood, or rather, as I may say, ere we were in it, for there lay our only chance of safety from those villains who were now nearing the shore. But how to penetrate the thicket of brambles, lianas, ground-pines, agaves, and other prickly shrubs that did hedge the land beyond the sea-sands, where the ground rose towards the woods, I knew not; for though I should not have hesitated to plunge into this growth being by myself, albeit the flesh of my legs would have paid dearly, yet could I attempt no such thing with Lady Biddy, whose skirts had been torn from her body and her tender limbs lacerated cruelly at the very outset, and she eventually been held a prisoner in the bonds of those thorny vines. So still we kept to the coast, running on as swiftly as the shifting sand would allow, all the time hand in hand, and with a good heart, until another shout behind us made my heart sink and banished the smile from my lady's cheek; for now we knew that one of the boats had reached the shore.

"A little further, Lady Biddy—a little further," says I cheerfully.

"Yes, Benet," says she, hopefully still, yet with difficulty from the shortness of her breathing. "I can run a good way yet."

Now glancing aside I saw a hillside where the trees were of a prodigious height, and so close together that their branches mingled in one wide-spreading solid canopy, and loth I was to pass them by, for I knew by my experiences on the Oronoque that beneath these trees nothing grew but toadstools and such growth for the want of light, and there might we have run with ease as far as that sort of trees extended, but the thicket on the hither side was impassable, so there was no help for it but to run on.

Presently I saw Lady Biddy bend her head, biting her nether lip with her teeth, as if to control some pain, and this, together with hearing the report of a musket in our rear, showing that our pursuers were getting within gunshot of us, did work me up with desperation, so that I was minded to catch my companion in my arms, and essay whether I might not that way struggle through the thorny barrier. And this course I resolved to take if in fifty paces no less desperate measure was to be found.

Fifty paces were covered, and yet there was no sign of any opening in that rank growth; then I added another ten; and after that, ten more; when, casting my eye again upon Lady Biddy, I saw in her despairing eyes that she could go no further.

I stopped, and, leaning upon my shoulder for support, she gasps—

"One moment, Benet. I shall be better in a moment."

I looked back (yet in a manner not to affright the poor girl), and saw the seamen doggedly running on, but no nearer, Heaven be thanked, which surprised me, although each man was encumbered with his musket and other arms. But seeing us at a stand they set up a shout, and began to mend their pace.

"Now," said Lady Biddy, and again we started forward.

Hardly had we made half a dozen yards when I stopped her with a cry of joy, for there, lying flush with the outlying growth of what I term the thicket, was a great mass of dry, brown, broad leaves, which I knew for the head of a cabbage-tree, which, though it promised nothing to an inexperienced eye, did to mine betoken a means of crossing the thicket by its stem, which is never less than 150 feet long in one falling to decay, and is more often 250 feet. And happily this tree in falling athwart the thicket had struck upon a rock, so that it was lifted well up above the more tangled growth.

Now I knew that if we could once get upon the stem of that tree we might have a convenient bridge for getting to a place where the ground was freer; and as there was no time to consider whether the thing was possible or not, I hurried Lady Biddy thither, and bidding her grip me tightly by the shoulders, I did set myself with all the strength and agility I possessed (which was doubled by the desperate occasion), to drag myself up by the hanging leaves to the crown of it; and thanks to the fibers of these leaves being of a prodigious toughness, as well as to the help of Providence, I succeeded so well that in a twinkling we stood side by side upon the trunk of this fallen tree.

Here were we well concealed from sight, but not so secure neither as was to my taste; so, begging Lady Biddy stay there till my return, I ran nimbly down the length of the palmetto, and then along the inner side of the thicket beneath the trees, where the growth was of moderate proportion, back in the direction we had come, till guessing I was about come level with our pursuers, I set up a great mocking laugh of derision to be heard of them. Upon which, to my great satisfaction, I heard one of the seamen shout to his fellows, who were in advance, to come back, for they had passed the game.

"Ay," shouts I, "and you'll have to look sharp to catch us at that."

The fellows replied by firing a volley into the thicket where they deemed I might be, but they might as usefully have fired into the sand for all the damage their bullets could do to me through that huge mass of shrubs and plants, whereof the best part are as tough as leather.

I gave them another laugh, but still a little further back from the part where I had left Lady Biddy, to make them conclude we were flying thence, and this enraging them beyond measure, they straightway plunged into the thicket, fancying that we had passed through, and that they might do the same. And first of all there was great cursing amongst them for the thorns that stuck in their legs; but as they pushed further in to free themselves, and only got the worse entangled, being torn and rent (as they must) from head to foot at every moment, the cries of pain and rage that these wretches set up were enough to make any heart glad to hear.

Leaving them in this pickle I sped back the way I had come, and found Lady Biddy had of herself passed along the length of the great cabbage tree and got down by the upturned roots. Without waste of time we continued our way, keeping within the grateful shade of the trees, yet holding on within sight of the thicket that we might have some notion, however vague, of our whereabouts.

We kept on at a briskish pace without stopping (except that once I went a little out of my way to pluck some guava apples, which were a great refreshment and comfort to us) for best part of an hour, I take it, by which time the nature of the ground took a new aspect, and seeing some dead reeds entangled in the branches of a bush I perceived they must have been left there by flood of waters. This led me to conclude we were near some river, which gave me no small satisfaction, for already my mind was becoming anxious with regard to the question of water to drink. As we proceeded the traces of flood became more plentiful, and at length coming to the verge of the wood we found ourselves on the edge of a lagoon, stretching upwards of a mile towards a broad river, whose yellow waters were cut off from the blue sea by a long neck of sand that extended as far as the eye could reach.

This lagoon was a dismal waste of refuse washed down by the swollen river in the rainy season, for as yet the new growth of reeds had not penetrated the mass, except here and there where a patch of tender green rose amidst the wide expanse of rotting vegetation. But if the foreground was dismal to look on, the eye was recompensed by that which lay beyond. For there the sky was pierced by the glittering summits of prodigious mountains, whose sides swept down to lesser hills of purple rock, and these again in undulating slopes to the blue sea and the river, which on its further side shone like gold in the sunlight. And these lower slopes did at first look as though a sunset cloud had settled upon them; yet at a second glance did rather seem as if they were covered over with a vast tapestry, in which were woven all shades of green, mingled with bright patches of red and orange, purple and rose-pink, by reason of the many-hued flowers which crowned the trees, as no traveler shall deny who has cast eyes on those wondrous woods.

For a minute we stood still looking in amaze and delight upon this prospect, for it was the first we had seen of those mountains, but then we bethought us of those wretches we had left behind (who for certain would stay no longer than they could help in the thorns), and likewise I perceived we must yet follow up the course of this river before we could get water fit to drink. Added to which the lagoon bred abundance of stinging flies, and I feared there might likewise be reptiles in such a spot, so again we stepped forward.

Before long we found it necessary to penetrate further into the wood by reason of the ground rising abruptly from the river; yet still we kept as near as might be to the river, every now and again pausing in our upward walk where a break offered view of

the river below and the mountains beyond.

We kept on, for Lady Bidy would not allow that she was fatigued, until I heard, as I thought, the breaking of water; and passing a huge rock we saw, to my inexpressible satisfaction, a silvery stream of water tumbling down the gorge that opened before us.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BY MY ARRANT FOLLY I LOSE MY DEAR LADY BIDDY.

The sides of this gorge (which was prodigiously steep and profound, looking as if the rock had at one time been riven asunder) were craggy and barren, save here and there where some vines and brush had taken root in the crannies; however, by dint of agility in helping each other with our hands, we got down to a shelf or table of rock very agreeably covered with a soft sward, where we could rest in comfort, and refresh ourselves to our hearts' content with the wonderful sweet water we found there in a pool formed by a hollow of the rock.

And here was shade from the sun (which was now at its height), and a little cool breeze carried down by the falling water, so that we were well disposed to rest awhile, and overcome the fatigue produced by our long and difficult march, to say nothing of the exhaustion which we owed to the terrors of the morning. It seemed to me prudent also, as well as pleasurable, to repose till the heat of the day was moderated, in order to gain strength for our next march, which must carry us beyond the reach of Rodrigues and his wicked pirates, and as no place could be more proper for that purpose than this (wherein only by accident could we be discovered), I tore up from the rock half a dozen soft turfs, and, disposing them like a pillow, begged Lady Biddy to lie down at her ease.

Thanking me very sweetly, she did as I bade her, and presently fell asleep as gently as any child, which gave me exceeding happiness, for it showed how greatly she trusted in my protecting care.

For some time I sat watching her face, from which peaceful sleep had smoothed away all traces of fear and trouble, observing how her white teeth did gleam through her parted red lips; how her nether lip was round, and her upper lip pointed like a little bow, curved up; how her dark lashes curled; and how a little lock of hair had strayed from her gathered tresses and fluttered in the breeze loose upon her pale brow. I say I sat noting these trifles with an indescribable emotion in my breast; and truly, if all the world had been offered me, in exchange for my present condition, I would have refused it a thousand times. Nay, so selfish did my great joy make me, that I believe I would not have undone the past, though it had been to Lady Biddy's advantage.

My emotions growing by indulgence, and passion stirring within me as I feasted my eyes upon that lovely face, I was sorely tempted to touch her head with my fingers, yet in such a gentle manner as it should not awake her; but stretching out my hand I seemed to see upon it the blood of those men I had killed, so that I dropped it in shame, thinking what a wretch I was, and how cowardly to attempt upon her sleeping what I dared not offer if she were waking; moreover, what cleansing of my heart as well as of my hands there must be ere I might touch her without reproach.

Taking myself to task in this manner, I perceived that I must give my passion no loose, lest it should run away with me; and so, turning my eyes from her face, I set myself to think about the future and what measure I must take for my tender companion's comfort, as being vastly more creditable than the self-indulgence I had given way to.

And first, a griping in my vitals did put me in mind that we could not live on guava apples and water alone, but must have more solid victuals to strengthen us against the hardships of traveling in the desert that lay before us.

How was I to get meat? Never was man since the days of Orson so naked for the chase. Not a bodkin had I; nay, not even a stick with which to strike down a snake. Birds we had seen galore in the fruitful thicket, and thinking of the savory dish I might make of a young macaw for my Lady Biddy put me in mind of my old weapon—a sling. Then casting about for material to make this simple engine, I bethought me of my shoe that was furnished with a tongue, very proper for my purpose. Whereupon I whipped off the said shoe, and getting a sharp-edged stone I made a shift to cut it out.

"Now," thinks I, "if I had but a thorn for an awl, and a strip of silk grass for a thong, the business would be done in a trice."

Thorns there were (and to spare) in the thicket above, and I doubted not I might also find grass or the fibre of a palmetto to serve my turn. And seeing that I could get to the thicket and yet keep my eye on Lady Biddy for her safety, I cast a glance at my companion, whose bosom still heaved very gently and regularly; and satisfied she would not awake for some while, I rose and scaled the steep side of the gorge.

Being come to the top I looked down; my lady had not stirred, and so I set about cheerfully to get me the things I needed. After a little search I found a sort of grass nearly an ell long and reasonably tough, and stripping this down so as to get the mid-rib, I tested it, and found it would serve well enough for a few casts. As for a thorn, I found that without seeking—a stickle as long as a cock's spur and as sharp as any needle piercing through my breeches as I stooped to pluck a blade of the aforesaid grass.

Having all that I needed (and more, by the smarting wound in my thigh), I went back to the edge of the gorge whence I could see Lady Biddy, and set about making my sling. This being done to my satisfaction—not so stout as I could wish, but good enough as a makeshift—I hunted about for round stones, and got me half a dozen suitable enough. And now being armed, I itched to put my weapon to its use.

There was not a sound but the breaking of the water, and all around looked so still and peaceful that I deemed I might safely venture to ramble a little way in quest of game. Yet still I hesitated, but just then I heard the whir of wings hard by, and casting my eye that way, spied a bird which later I heard the Indians call a *macucagua*, about the size of an English pheasant and not unlike it, making for a plantain tree that stood in a coppice not far distant. I saw him alight on the tree and attack its fruit, on which this bird is a greedy feeder, and after him I started as stealthily as I might, that he should not take wing again before I got within range. From bush to bush I crept, till, getting pretty close, I slipped a stone into the sole of my sling, and stepping into the open gave my sling a twirl and let fly. By good chance my shot hit the bird in the neck, and so much to his damage that flying up he beat his wings vainly against the boughs and then fell fluttering to the ground. Yet was he only stupefied by the blow, and, being come to the ground, flew up again away for a furlong, and thence up once more and off for half a furlong more, so that by the time I finally overtook him and put an end to the business by wringing his neck I was pretty well three parts of a mile from the coppice where I started. However, I took not much heed of this or of the time it had taken me to steal to the coppice from the gorge, being mightily pleased with myself for my address.

Handling my bird I was as pleased as any fool to observe how fat he was, to find that he weighed four pounds if an ounce, etc.: nay, I was so fond as to pluck one of his tail feathers and stick it in my coat for a trophy. Then I fell to considering how I should dress him, and remembering how I had got fire by rubbing two dry sticks together that time I was in the Oronoque, I wasted another ten minutes in seeking wood that would serve my turn now. In short, by the time I had brought this silly business to an end and started off to rejoin Lady Biddy, more than half an hour was gone from the moment I began it.

When I got back to the edge of the gorge and looked down, I came to a stand like one suddenly bereft of his senses. Lady Biddy was gone!

I could not fetch my breath; the bird that was paid for so dearly slipped from my powerless fingers, nor did I ever see anything more of him save the feather I had stuck in my coat, and my limbs quaked under me. Then I would not believe but that I had mistaken the place, until the turfs I had pulled up for a pillow met my eye and convinced me that it was there and nowhere else that I had left her.

"She is gone!" I moaned; and then, striking my breast with my clenched fist, I muttered, "And thou, villain, must answer for her fate."

Then, hoping that she had but strolled a little way to find me, I rushed along the edge of the ravine to a rock that hung over the deep cleft. From this point I could see down to the bottom of the gorge where the stream ran into the river. Just within this creek lay a boat, which only too clearly discovered the reason why Lady Biddy was no longer where I had left her.

At that very moment I heard her voice calling faintly as from a great distance—

"Benet, Benet!" Then there was silence while I looked in vain to see her down the ravine, doubting not that she was being carried away to the boat below.

"Benet!" she cried, yet a little louder, yet still faintly. "Benet!"

I felt sure that she saw me and was crying for help, and it maddened me that I could not see her. Nor could I guess from her voice in what part of the ravine she had been taken for the breaking of the waters and the echo of the rocks. But leaping to another rock and craning my neck over, I caught sight of two fellows, whom I knew for Rodrigues' rascals, rounding a bend of the gorge below. And one of them, facing about, lifts his finger warningly as if to signal those who followed that they should stifle Lady Biddy's cry for help.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I FIND MY LADY BIDDY, AND WE DESPOIL OUR ENEMIES; WITH OTHER FACETIOUS MATTER.

The moment I concluded that those wretches at the foot of the ravine were carrying off Lady Biddy I threw myself down the rocks to her rescue; and had the chances of breaking my neck thereby been a hundredfold as great I should not have hesitated. For I considered that it was by my fault she had been taken, and that therefore I owed my life for hers; indeed, I valued not my life as a straw, save as it might be of service to her, for what use was life to me without her? I might as well be dead and forgotten as alive and she lost; nay better, for to live bereft for ever of her, or in doubt as to her fate, would be continual misery and the cause of never-abating self-reproach.

With these thoughts running confusedly in my head and urging me to desperate leaps which I had never dared to attempt in cooler blood, I descended that rocky gorge like any bounding ball, till coming to level ground, I spied half a dozen fellows clustered together in the shadow of a rock round one who was slicing a pine-nut to share among them. But no Lady Biddy could I see; nor was there any sign of her between them and the boat which lay hard by in the creek, as I have said.

By this time, the heat of my spirits being somewhat abated I reasoned with myself that to attack those six men, unarmed as I was, would be a piece of foolhardy madness which could do her no good, nor me neither, except as the cutting of my throat would put me out of my present anxiety, and that if I was to rescue her at all it must be by cunning. Whereof I set myself to approach them unseen, that I might learn, if possible, where they had bestowed their captive, and this I did without great difficulty, for hereabouts were many scattered stones and abundant growth of prickly shrubs, ground-palms, and the like.

Being come so nigh them that I could hear their remarks upon the fruit they were eating, which seemed entirely to occupy their thoughts, I waited for the conversation to take another turn. Presently one of them, flinging himself on the ground, says:

"Well, mates, I take it we've done work enough for this bout, so here shall I lie at my ease till it be time to fill the barricoes and get back a ship-board."

"Ay, I'm with you there, Jack," says another, following his example.

The rest were not slow to lie down likewise, save one, who, scratching his head, says:

"How about this here female we are to carry back alive or dead?"

"Plague take her, say I, and the likes of her," grunted he who spoke first. "What do we want of females? She's brought us no luck, and I'd as soon see a rat in the ship."

"So say I," chimed in his mate. "The other fellows have gone after her, and let them catch her if they may. For my own part I wish her no worse luck than to give them leg-bail and lose herself in these woods. You don't catch me running after no females till I get back to Penzance."

Hearing this I was struck with amazement, and could not too much admire my folly in rushing headlong into danger without proper occasion. For now I readily perceived what was the fact, that Lady Biddy, awaking after my departure, had caught sight of the men at the foot of the gorge and taken measures to conceal herself from discovery should they ascend. While thus hidden she had seen me come upon that point of rock, and to attract my attention, had called me by name as loud as she dared. My descent had been too furious for her to stop me by her further cries, which were lost upon my ear; and thus, in going to her, as I thought, had drawn myself away.

However, it was with a glad heart that I perceived my folly, and stealthily withdrew from those men whom a few minutes earlier I was like to have fallen among, and turned to follow the course of the torrent to the level above.

I made short work of this business when I was fairly out of sight of the seamen, and before long I again heard that sweet voice calling, "Benet, Benet!" upon which, casting my eyes eagerly about, I descried my dear Lady Biddy in a little natural cavern formed by two leaning rocks. She clasped her hands, and her face beamed with joy to see me again; but if she was pleased—lord! what was I? Then we sat down together and narrated our experiences, I blaming myself hugely for my headstrong conduct; yet still she smiled.

"Won't you be angry with me, Lady Biddy, for my rashness?" says I.

"Nay," says she; "you may blame yourself, but I cannot; for was it not to save me you encountered this danger? Since it has ended thus, I can but be pleased with this proof of your devotion. Yet, when I call again, I would not have you run away."

Then we were silent awhile; I know not why, except that I was too happy to speak.

But presently, reflecting on the dangers we had escaped, and considering how we might yet be encompassed by those who had given us chase on the sands—for, if one parcel of wretches came hither by accident, why might not the rest?—it came into my head that if we could descend and possess ourselves of the empty boat while the men were yet sleeping, we might

come to the other side of the river, and so secure ourselves from pursuit. This scheme did so recommend itself to me that I at once propounded it to Lady Biddy.

"Have you not run enough risk, Benet?" she asked, a little frightened by the audacity of my design.

"Ay," says I; "and 'tis for that very reason I would put that broad river betwixt us and the recurrence of such risks."

"As you will," says she, with spirit. "If it ought to be done, you shall not find me wanting in courage."

I gave her my reasons for thinking it should be attempted, and she was the first to rise, saying, as she did so:

"I am ready. Let us set about it at once."

So, with good heart, we started to encounter this new peril.

First of all we followed the stream of waterfalls till we found a part where we could cross to the other side, and, getting over without great difficulty, we scaled the further slope, that from the ridge we might discover some other way of reaching the river-side than by the gorge.

And here we found the hillside clothed with a very dense wood, having but little undergrowth because of the shade. By running from tree to tree we managed very well to break the descent, and came at length into wet ground; but in these parts there is no danger or hardship in wetting the feet; so along this level we made our way till we came to a great growth of reeds that stood like a green wall before us. Here we went up a little, for the reeds betokened deeper water, besides being a harbor for cockodrills and water-snakes; then, pushing on still further, we reached the end of that reedy growth, and perceived we were come to the creek where the stream discharged itself, and not a stone's throw from the boat. Whereupon I bade Lady Biddy wait there patiently awhile, and crept forward, under cover of the bush, until I caught sight of the seamen. They were all asleep like so many logs, and most of them on their faces, as is the manner of mariners when they slumber.

Coming from my cover I stepped into the stream, which spread out and was of considerable depth, and carefully waded to the boat, unhitched the head line from the bush to which it was attached, and letting it swing out into the current drew it as gently as might be to that spot where Lady Biddy was waiting in pale concern.

I beckoned to her, and she came boldly out and stepped noiselessly into the boat; then got I in after her, and, taking up an oar, shoved gently out over the shoal until I had depth and room to ply my oars. Still was I obliged to be stealthy, for we were yet within gunshot, and the fellows had their muskets with them; nor had they left a weapon in the boat save only one sword, which, however, was a treasure to me. So then I pulled for some while very gently, but getting a furlong from the shore I laid to with a will; and it was a great delight to see how Lady Biddy did smile and rub her hands together for glee.

Now, being out a good way, I saw that this was no river at all, so far as I could make out, but only a great lake of water made by the stream that rushed down the hills and flooded the valley in the rainy season. There was no break in the chain of hills that environed us, and we were, as it seemed, in the centre of a prodigious hollow. And these slopes were all clothed with trees in bloom (the flowering season not yet being over), and wherever the eye rested it was delighted with glowing hues, brilliant where the sun fell, and delicate in the shade, so that looking around it was as if a thick haze of color rose from these woods.

"It is like a land of faerie," said Lady Biddy; and, indeed, it did seem like enchantment. Yet was I sorry this was not a river, but only a kind of lagoon; however, I knew it would cost our pursuers a week to get at us by going round the lake by those thick, tangled woods; nor could they fetch another boat to our pursuit without giving us ample time for escape.

As we neared the opposite shore the chain of mountains disappeared behind the nearer hills, which showed that they were at a considerable distance; but this gave me no great concern. Nor did I cast my eyes that way frequently, being more intent to see if the fellows had discovered the loss of their boat. We reached the shore, and yet I could see no sign of their moving, though I plainly descried the rock against which they lay.

We had fallen down a little towards the sea by reason of a current where the lake, as I call it, disembogued into the sea beyond the bar of sand, so that when we landed we perceived the black ship lying out at her moorings, but happily at a great distance.

I pulled the boat into the bank, which was here washed by the current free of the refuse that lay upon the other side, and having helped Lady Biddy to land, I fetched the sword out of the boat, and drawing it from its scabbard found it was as a good sword as any could wish to have, which was a great comfort to me.

While I was making fast the boat I was startled by a loud thump in the hinder part of it; but upon opening the locker to see what might have caused this noise, I discovered then to my great delight a *tortugua*^[1] lying on his back. Then, calling Lady Biddy, I bade her come and look at the supper our enemies had provided for us. At first she was frightened at the sight of this poor, inoffensive creature, never having seen the like before; but when I told her that it was excellent meat as any prince might eat, she was as pleased as I, being by this time pretty sharp set. Then, having both a mind to make our supper whilst we might, she set about to gather sticks for a fire while I dispatched the tortugua and cut some steaks ready for dressing with my sword-blade, for other cutlery had we none.

While I was still at this business, Lady Biddy comes back with her arms full of sticks, and very cheerful.

"But, Benet," says she, of a sudden, dropping the wood and turning aghast, "what is the use of wood with nothing to light it?"

So I showed her how to get fire by rubbing two bits of touchwood together, and to see us on our knees blowing the embers into a flame, choking as the smoke got into our throats, and laughing as we rubbed our smarting eyes, all as merry as grigs, one would have thought we had come there a pleasuring and had no trouble in the world. It is clear enough why I was happy, but I can only explain Lady Biddy's lightness of heart by contrasting her present condition with the days and nights of terror and bitter suffering that had gone before.

Be that how it may, I know this, that, as we knelt before the fire cooking our steaks on the end of sticks, we had to lay them down for laughing, when we heard the poor fools on the other side of the lake firing off their muskets in rage to find their boat gone, and to see the smoke of the fire at which we were cooking their tortugua for our own comfort. Indeed, to think of the plight of those who did seek to do us mortal hurt—one party cursing in the midst of tearing thorns, and the other with no means of getting back to their ship but by threading intricate woods, with a sorry reception when they showed themselves to their captain at last—was enough to make any cat laugh.

CHAPTER XXX.

I FIND MYSELF IN THE PARADISE OF FOOLS.

When we had regaled ourselves on the steaks of the tortugua, which is a sweet, wholesome, and excellent meat, we rambled together into the woods in search of fruit to quench our thirst, for water there was none save that of the lake, which was troubled and brackish and not good to drink.

On my way I pointed out to my lady those fruits which were venomous, for there are many such—nay, there be some plants whose flowers are terribly unwholesome to smell—and those which are sweet and good; of these latter we ate freely, also I did cull here and there a flower whose delicacy and sweetness stayed her to admire.

But while we were looking for pine-nuts, which I deem the most estimable fruit that exists, I found that which was better for quenching our thirst than fruits. This was a tree, about twelve or fifteen fathoms high, with leaves as broad as a hand and as long as one's forearm, which I had found in the Oronoque country. With a cry of gladness I bade Lady Biddy look to see a new marvel, and drawing my sword I gave the trunk a fair cut; from this wound there started forth a thick white juice, and by the time I had found a broad clean leaf and folded it to serve as a vessel, the juice was running out abundantly. Clapping my folded leaf below the wound I had in a few minutes as much as the leaf would contain, which was the best part of a pint, and this I bade Lady Biddy to drink of without fear. At the first sip she declared it was excellent good milk as ever she did taste, and so it was, as I found when my turn came to drink. This tree, I say, is common in Guiana, and I go about to insist upon it, because I have found many here in England who would not have it such a thing is in nature, albeit they will readily accept as probable many stories of travelers that are outrageously impossible, wherein they resemble him who strains at a gnat and swallows a camel.

Now being quite refreshed we returned to the shore, where, seeing the fire yet smouldering, I bethought me to cook the rest of the tortuga as a provision for the morrow. With a stick I raked a hole in the midst of the embers; then at the bottom I set a flat clean stone for a hearth, and on this I laid as much of the meat as was fit to eat, turning it over from time to time to brown on that hot stone.

As soon as Lady Biddy saw what I was at, and the manner of doing it, she said:

"That is a woman's work, Benet, which I can do as well as you may. Leave this business to me, I pray you, and occupy yourself with the serious matters that are beyond my capacity": and though she meant no reproach, I felt certain, these words put me in mind that I was in a fool's paradise.

"Fool!" says I to myself, as I left her side, "think you this happiness can endure? Are you so fond as to imagine that this savage life, which is a joy for you, is fit for a lady of gentle breeding and refined sentiments—that, because you can picture no greater joy than to live with her alone in this wilderness, she can desire no better companion than you? Because her mind is enfeebled by long days and nights of suspense and terrible doubts, she rejoices like a child in the beauty of flowers and the taste of fruits; she can join with you in laughter at the discomfiture of her enemies; she can readily accommodate herself to the rude necessities of her condition, but, when her mind recovers its strength and composure, nothing in this wilderness, however beautiful and enchanting it be, can content her for the loss of gentle friends, and the absence of those delicate enjoyments which have made her what she is. To-morrow she will weep, for she is a Christian lady, and thou art but a savage."

With these arguments did I bring myself to a clearer perception of our estate and of my duty, which was to sacrifice myself rather than Lady Biddy; to endeavor my utmost to bring her to her friends, and therein shrink not before any pain to myself. "And truly," adds I, addressing myself as before—"truly your own interest prescribes this course, for how can you hope to win the esteem of that dear creature unless you do deserve it? If, instead of yielding her to your friends, you followed the bent of evil inclination, and led her whither no help could reach her, then would there be not a pin for her to choose betwixt you and such a villain as Rodrigues; and though she regards you now with trust and tenderness, how must her feelings change to contempt and disgust if she find you are but an enemy, betraying her to your own selfish ends, under the mask of friendship!"

Notwithstanding this reasoning, I was sadly downcast, and had no more relish for duty than if the argument had been all on t'other side. And so, being come to the edge of the sea, I stood there with my arms folded, looking out over the sea, very down in the mouth, and as sluggish in my mind as if I had nought to do but to stand there all the rest of my days.

From this torpor I was aroused by Lady Biddy coming to my side, so softly that I had not in my dull mood heard her approach, and touching my arm.

Starting in surprise and turning about, I found her looking very gravely and wistfully into my face; for I must think that the dear soul, seeing me go off silent and heavy, and standing apart with a moody aspect, had concluded that I was hurt by her taking the cooking of the tortuga out of my hands.

"I have cooked the meat; but now," says she, with a little shrug and a smile, "I don't know what to do with it."

An ordinary woman in her place would have asked what ailed me so suddenly; but she was of a finer and more delicate nature, and sought to reconcile me without causing me to blush for taking umbrage at a trifle.

For my own part I was glad to believe she had mistaken the cause of my disorder, and was better content she should think me a fool than a rogue. But I felt vastly ashamed of myself, for all that, to find that my demeanor had discovered me. However, I did my best to make amends for my sullen humor by rousing myself to a cheerful complexion as I answered her.

"Why," says I, "the meat must be wrapped in fresh leaves, as well to preserve it from the flies as to keep it cool and clean for our use in traveling; and as I have not yet decided which course it will be best to take, for it is a serious and grave question, I will leave you to seek leaves for that purpose."

"With all my heart," says she cheerfully. "I want to be useful if I may; but I will bring the leaves for you to see, lest the napkin poison our food."

Thus by a little deception did I restore her better opinion of my temper, at the same time that her pretty behavior roused me to a more manly feeling.

Presently she comes back with a store of leaves, which I found very proper for her use, and then away she trips to pack the meat.

When I had settled what was best to be done, I went to her and found she had just finished her business, and admirably neat she had done it, so that I was forced to admit I could never have succeeded so well, which I thought it gave her great pleasure to hear.

"And have you decided what we are to do next?" she asked.

"I am not so fixed but that I should be glad to have your opinion," says I; "and if you will come down to the point whence I have been surveying our position, you may more readily judge what we may do for the best."

"You will make me vain, Benet," says she, with a smile.

"Now," says I, when we were come to the shore, "tell me if you can see any trace of our pursuers opposite."

"No, I can see none of them—nothing moving," says she, after looking intently.

"Then we may take it they are making their way round the coast to rejoin their comrades who came in the other boat. By this time probably all the crew is on the shore, looking for water. Unless they find a spring or a stream to the west, which is little likely by the position of the hills, they will come here again to the stream yonder. But to fill their barricoes they must bring round a boat; now I can see none as far as my vision reaches—can you?"

She scanned the distance carefully, and replied that she saw nothing betwixt us and the ship.

"It is probable," says I, "that the men will content themselves with fruit for the present, but when Rodrigues learns that we have taken the boat, and that there is water in this part, he will send other boats hither. That is not likely to happen for some hours. In the mean while we must escape, and I think it will be best to do so in the boat. We are too far distant to be perceived from the ship; and even if we be, we have such a start of them as they can not hope to fetch up with us, for if we see our pursuers a mile off we may take to the woods."

"Where do you reckon to go in the boat?" asks Lady Biddy.

"Why," says I, "betwixt the chain of hills that surrounds us and those mountains we saw beyond, there should be a valley, and there should be a river to carry off the waters that flow from the mountains. If we are to find a town of Christians it should be at the mouth of that river, for there would lie the most fitting place to receive the produce brought down by the river from the interior parts of the country."

"Then you intend to make for that town?" says she, opening wide her eyes, as I deemed (not without a pang of jealousy), with delight.

"Yes," says I.

"But, Benet," says she, "this may be the very town Rodrigues spoke of as the one he intended to go to—the place where he has friends. Still, the town must be far hence, or he would not have cast anchor where he has."

"Why, that is true," says I, greatly admiring this girl's quick reasoning.

"In that case we may embark at once, and escape our present danger. We ought not to lose that chance, for you see how poor I am upon my feet."

"I will not admit that; but you are right in all else you have put forward, and so let us embark at once," says I.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WE THINK THE WORST OF OUR TROUBLES ARE OVER; BUT THEY ARE NOT.

Before we departed from that place I wounded the milk-tree in divers places, and, with Lady Biddy's help, drew off nigh upon half a gallon of juice, with which we filled a small keg which, as luck would have it, the seamen had left in the locker. Also I cut a fan-shaped palmetto-leaf with a long stem for Lady Biddy to protect her head, and likewise I got a leaf for my own crown, tying it under my chin with that sling I had in my pocket, for though the sun was now sinking this heat was prodigious. Then, with our store of provisions in the locker, we slipped out with the current—the tide of the sea being yet at ebb—and passing the bar came into the open water, which was as smooth and fair as the sky above.

Looking about us we were comforted to perceive no boat nor any sign of our enemy nearer than the black ship, which lay best part of two leagues, as I judged, to the east. This distance I strove to increase by laying vigorously on to my oars and making for the west; but by keeping too close in shore I ran presently on a sandbank; and, getting off that, grounded shortly after on a second; and thence on a third; till at length, seeing that I made less speed than haste, I was compelled to pull out a quarter of a mile or more for deeper water, and so get free of those plaguy sands.

However, I was consoled for the loss of time and my discomfort by the pleasure of Lady Biddy, as we thus again obtained a view of the majestic mountains I have spoken of. Indeed, I was fain to lose another five minutes, resting on my oars, and looking over my shoulder at the superb spectacle; for the sun, being now in its decline, did light up these mountains so that they were glorious to behold. Some of the peaks burnt and sparkled like cut diamonds—indeed, they may have been crystal, for all I know to the contrary—while others shot up like tongues of flame, as if the sun by its near approach had set them afire; then those further from his course shone all rosy, pink with shadows of tender violet.

Lower down, their sides glowed with rich shades of purple, yet painted over with a soft bloom like any plum. As for the valley below, 'twas like naught in the world but a great maze of lilac-bushes, by reason of the flowering trees.

Quitting this prospect I scanned the sea very closely, yet could I see nothing like a sail of any kind, which made me doubt whether there lay any town in those parts we were coming to; for if there were, then most likely would there be fishers; and with a smooth sea and a gentle air, they surely would be abroad casting nets at this time. This raised a secret joy in my heart; but, Lord! when I glanced back at those incredibly high mountains, I was awed by the vastness of the wilderness in which we must somewhere make a dwelling-place.

To make up for lost time I now bent my back to the work before me, and rowed on very steadily, only casting my eye round over my shoulder from time to time for my guidance. Lady Biddy was very thoughtful and grave, as if she likewise was impressed with awe by the aspect of those vast mountains. Moreover, she was recovering that strength and composure of mind which enabled her to gauge her condition justly, as I had foreseen; and this she could not do without perceiving how slender was the thread of hope that held her from despair. But, despite the return of strength, there was more in her heart than she could bear; and when she had been sitting in silence thus some while, she turned her head aside, as if to scan the shore, but it was that I should not see her eyes. Presently she stole her hand up and gently wiped away a tear that was stealing down her cheek, and I saw a movement of her fair throat, as though she were choking down a sob. And this so moved me that I had much ado to keep from weeping in sympathy.

She gave another little gulp, and pushed again the tear from her cheek—poor soul, she had no handkerchief; and then with an effort turns to me, and, seeing my long face, laughed faintly, though her eyes were yet full.

"We're better off than we were this time yesterday," says I as cheerfully as I could, but with a horrid thick voice.

"Ay," says she, "and 'tis ungrateful and foolish to forget it."

"Why, as for that," says I, "a scald will smart none the less for your getting out of hot water. But 'tis a comfort to know that we are not likely to get into the same broth again, and may reasonably hope to be relieved of our pain in time, and not long neither, which will give us patience to endure our present ills."

"I will be patient; indeed I will," says she earnestly. "'Tis the least I can do in return for your goodness, Benet."

"Let us talk of something else," says I.

"Can you make any guess as to where we are?" she asks presently.

"Ay," says I, with as stout a voice as if I were telling the truth, "I make no question of our whereabouts, or I should not have spoken so hopefully."

"But you did not seem to know before we started"—with a shrewd glance.

"No, for then I could not see the run of the mountains. Now, when we landed before supper I could not have sworn but we were in Campeachy, or Honduras, or the Isle of Cuba."

"How could you know after we had eaten?" says she.

"Because our thirst led to the discovery of the milk-tree. Then I knew we must be in Guiana, for they grow nowhere else"; adding to myself, "for aught I know."

A little smile of satisfaction played about her face; then she asked eagerly:

"And what have you learnt by the run of the mountains?"

"Why, that we can't be many miles from the Gulf of Paria. For, if you will recall Sir Bartlemy's chart to mind, you will remember that the only mountains in Guiana that run by the sea are there."

"What part of the chart, Benet?" says she, knitting her brows.

"Up at the top, against Trinidado."

"Oh! I remember," said she, clapping her hands joyfully. "Why, that is close to where you left—left *him*!"

"Yes," says I; "and the very place Sir Bartlemy will go to refit, if I know aught about the matter."

In this way did I bring her round to a more cheerful temper and a forgetfulness of her position. Nay, I almost cheated myself in trying to deceive her. For, to tell the truth, I had no honest opinion that we were near Paria, else had we seen by this time Margarita, or some of those isles thereabouts. Rather I was inclined to think we were over against the mountains of Guayva. However, I believe we were in neither the one place nor the other but on the coast of Darian—these huge mountains being a spur of the Andes; and if we were not there, then I know not where we were.

I kept on long after the sun had set, nor would I have stayed when I did but for the rocks which began to encumber the shore, and my fear to venture far abroad lest some current should get me into trouble.

Coming now to a kind of cove, well sheltered with rocks and convenient to abide in, as far as we could judge by the light of the stars, I threw out the grapple, which was made fast to the headline, and found it held very well.

This being done, we ate a second supper of turtle and milk; after which I made up as comfortable a bed in the bottom of the boat as was to be had with no better material than the lug-sail, and induced Lady Biddy to lie down and get some sleep, promising to wake her as soon as the day broke, and get a few hours' sleep myself whilst she kept watch.

There was just enough light for me to descry her pale face at the further end of the boat as she lay on the rude bed. I sat watching her, maybe two hours, thinking by her stillness she had fallen asleep; but of a sudden, without moving, she says:

"Benet, do you think we could get there in a week?"

I answered—though with a feeling that I did wrong to encourage a false hope—I answered, I say, that I thought we might do so.

"If we have good luck," she adds.

"Good luck we must have, for the worst is past," says I.

"Yes, I think so," says she. "Good-night."

And in this belief she fell asleep, perhaps to dream her hopes were realized.

Alas! she was soon to be roused from that dream—soon to know that the worst was not past.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WE ARE ENCOMPASSED WITH BLACKAMOORS, TO OUR GREAT PERIL.

It was drawing near morning, and a breeze had sprung up, ruffling the waters, so that I had to keep the boat away from the rock with my oar, lest the bumping and grating of its side should disturb Lady Biddy's repose, which I would not have had for the world, and the tide being again at the ebb, my face was turned towards the opening in the rocks by which, as I say, we entered this little harbor, when I first heard the sound of a voice.

It seemed to my ear like a cry of triumph or discovery, and for the moment I believed that our pursuers had spied us from the cliff above; but on looking up where the black rock cut off the view of the starry sky I could see nothing but its jagged edge; moreover, I was convinced that no one from that height could spy us in this dark nook, for the light of the stars was only sufficient to show Lady Biddy's white face vaguely to me, and that only distant a few feet.

I looked around me, but naught was there but the dark rocks and the gray sea spread out beyond the outlet. Then I concluded this cry came from some owl or night-gull. Nevertheless, I kept very watchful, with eyes wide open, and would not suffer my thoughts to return to that sweet melancholy which the contemplation of Lady Biddy's face had provoked.

Presently I was seized with fresh alarm, as I perceived that one of the rocks that rose from the sea at the mouth of the cove glowed with a strange light, which could by no reasoning be explained, and the ripples of the sea were lit up in like manner. Every moment this glow grew stronger, yet very slowly as it seemed to me by reason of my great anxiety.

At length, this light growing so strong that I knew something must quickly come of it, I rose in the boat, grasping my oar in readiness, yet knowing not what in the world to expect.

Just as I got to my feet a great blazing fire shot into sight, so that my two eyes were so dazzled I could see naught else for a moment. However, as this confusion of my sight subsided, I perceived that the light came from a brazier or beacon basket of flaming wood fixed to the prow of a canoe, and behind it stood a savage as stark as he was born, with a long spear in his hand, while another savage behind him sat with his knees up to his chin, paddling with a single oar.

While I was wondering what this could mean, the fellow behind the beacon plunges his spear into the sea, and brings out a great silvery fish writhing on the barb.

I was overjoyed to find that these were no enemies, but only two simple naturals fishing in the manner of their country; and I resolved not to meddle with them in any way if I could help it. Turning to Lady Biddy, who had been awaked by the light, and was rising hastily to her feet, I motioned her to sit down, fearing her light gown might reflect the light, and be seen by the savages.

He with the paddle was heading the canoe across the mouth of the cove, when the other, having taken the fish from his spear, muttered a word or two, whereupon the first, with a deft stroke of his oar, turns the boat about, and so bears down upon the very place where we lay.

Now what to do I knew not; for, God knows, I wished these men no harm, and yet could I not risk to be treated like a fish by the fellow with the spear. Following the irregularities of the rocks the canoe came on, till shooting out in front of that rock behind which our boat lay, did the beacon blaze not two yards from my face. There was no time for further consideration, so, lifting my oar, I gave as loud a whoop as I could, at the same time swinging my oar with such force down on the brazier as every spark of fire was scattered out of it.

With a most heathenish howl of terror the two Indians leaped into the sea and got away without so much as showing their heads above water till they were clear of the cove, which, doubtless, they believed to be haunted by some devil or sea-monster.

At first I was disposed to make merry over this adventure, but after a bit I reflected that these fellows, coming from some adjacent village or town, would certainly carry the news to their neighbors, and return at daybreak in force to find out what manner of thing it was that had served them this trick, and what had become of their canoe. And as it was more than likely that, finding we were not the terrible creature their fears had figured, they would bear us no good-will, but rather seek to revenge themselves in cruel sort, I resolved that as soon as it grew light enough to see my way through the rocks, which were rendered now more dangerous by the freshening of the breeze and a chopping sea, we would go forward on our journey as speedily as we might. In the mean while I prepared myself for a good spell of work by making a hearty meal, Lady Biddy also eating a little to keep me in countenance, though she had not yet come to her appetite.

As soon, then, as the darkness began to lift, I unhitched the grapple and shoved out towards the open, yet not without foreboding, for I fancied I saw certain moving patches upon the water across the mouth of the cove, as if the savages were already abroad. Nor was I wrong in this conjecture, for scarcely had I pulled from the shadow of the rock into the gray light than they set up a terrible shout, and let fly a shower of arrows, whereof one went clean through the sleeve of my coat, but without scathing my arm, thanks be to God.

I begged Lady Biddy, for the love of Heaven, to lie down in the bottom of the boat, at the same time that I pushed back into the haven from which we had ventured, for here were we safe from arrows, and if the Indians had the stomach to come to close quarters I counted I could give a very good account of myself with my sword. But as to jeopardizing my dear lady's life by running through the flight of their arrows, that would I not do, though they kept us prisoner a whole day.

So here, having fastened the boat, I waited with my sword drawn, feeling pretty safe, for, thanks to the figure of the rocks, no canoe could enter the cove to shoot us down at a distance without passing so close that I might lay on them with my sword. This daunted them exceedingly, and though we could hear them hallooing and shouting close at hand, not one ventured to push his canoe beyond the cleft where we lay snug.

Lady Biddy put a bold face on this business; yet as the sun rose, and the whooping and hallooing increased, showing that our enemies were gathering in greater numbers, her eyes betrayed uneasiness. Indeed, I myself did by no means feel so sure of our safety as I pretended. If one canoe contrived to get past me into the inner part of the cove, then might the savages in it shoot us down at their ease. And though hitherto none had dared to slip by, I doubted but presently, by egging each other on with their taunts and cries, one would pluck up courage to make the attempt; then all would depend upon my address, for if but one of those wicked, cruel heathens got by alive with his bow and arrows, as I say, we might measure the length of our existence by minutes.

Nothing is so wearisome and fatiguing as to await the onslaught of a hidden foe. The nerves and muscles must be kept braced up, the mind must never relax its energy, and one's very breath comes with painful labor. Maybe those savages were wise enough to know this, for though they never ceased to make themselves heard, yet for hours they made no endeavor to do more. But at length, about eight o'clock, as I judge, my ear caught the dash of oars in the water above the din of voices, and the next moment the prow of a canoe shot into sight. And now, first of all, I flings one of my oars out so that it caught against a rock opposite, and another on the hither side, barring the passage, and the result of this was that, as the canoe shot forward, the oar catches the first natural in the loins and pitches him forward upon the next, and that one in his turn upon the third, to their great discomfiture; still, the oarsmen (who squat at the stern of the canoes in these parts) pushed forward, notwithstanding this cheek; but by this time I had snatched up my sword, and did lay on with such vigor that only two of the oarsmen out of the four escaped with their lives by backing out the way they ventured in. Of spear and bow men I believe I cut down five, not to speak of the two oarsmen, and this without getting a scratch myself, nor being any way the worse except for a prodigious sweat in every part.

Lady Biddy had covered her face with her hands when I took up the sword, for her delicate spirit could not abide the sight of bloodshed; and when it was all over she still hid her eyes, so that I was enabled to rinse my hand over the side of the boat unseen, and cleanse it from the blood that trickled down the blade and splashed beyond the cross in this fight. Also I wiped my sword clean, but I perceived pretty clearly I should never again be able to use that blade for cutting up tortuga nor any other manner of meat that my lady was to eat.

This business was hardly concluded when Lady Biddy asks timorously if it is all over.

"Yes," says I, "and I reckon the blackamoors have had enough for this day."

And so it seemed, for after the howling which was set up upon the defeat of the canoe, there was considerably less whooping than before, so that we did begin to comfort ourselves by thinking they had given up the attempt for a bad job, and would soon leave us in peace. But here were we grievously out of our reckoning, as we soon had occasion to know, for as I was sitting myself on a thwart to ease my legs a bit, an arrow flies down betwixt my knees, and sticks bolt upright in the bottom of the boat.

Now this I did think to make light of as a curious accident, deeming that a savage had fired up in the air and that his arrow had fallen thus nigh me by chance; but the next minute a second arrow falls but a foot away from the first, and then a third and fourth plump down in the water alongside the boat with a noise like great hailstones. Then casting my eyes up I perceived a row of these red savages along the edge of the cliff above. Not a minute did I lose, but snatching up the lug-sail I cast one side over the rocks beside us in such a manner as it formed a kind of roof over Lady Biddy's head; and though more than one arrow stuck in the canvas while this was a-doing, yet got I never so much as a graze, which shows how Providence does favor Christians, to the mortification of the heathen.

This being done I crept under the shelter beside Lady Biddy; yet was I careful to see that my oar still barred the passage well, and that my sword was ready to my hand in case of need.

The arrows came now thicker than ever; but though some came through the sail, yet was their force so broken that they could do us no mischief.

Seeing this, the savages gave over presently. Yet by the clatter they made with their kind of conversation above, I was fearful that they were only seeking to do us some fresh injury; nor did they keep us waiting long to perceive the turn their ingenuity had taken.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WE ARE LIKE TO BE CRUSHED UNDER A HUGE ROCK.

We were, I say, not long in ignorance of their intent. First of all there came some loose earth dropping in the water, and after that some little stones rattled down the side of the cliff, and then a bigger rock leaped down beside our boat, splashing the water in our faces. Upon my clapping my eye to one of the holes in the sail made by an arrow, I spied the rabble of savages above pushing at a huge rock and prising it with sticks and the poles of their spears. This rock was of a prodigious size, weighing, as I judged, many tons, and was lodged on a shelf of the cliff right over our heads. Every time they heaved together at this, some corner broke off and bounded down into the sea; and the main body, losing each time something of its support, yielded more and more, so that it swayed to and fro most terrible to behold.

Seeing this, my courage left me altogether; for what availed my arm and manhood against such an engine as this? My tell-tale face and quaking limbs struck terror into Lady Biddy's heart, so that she had no power to raise her voice above a whisper.

"What is it—what is it, Benet?" she asks, laying her hand on my arm.

And all I could answer was, "Lord help us!" as I dropped on my knees.

At this instant there sounded above a sharp snap, and this was followed by a terrific noise of rocks grating together, a huge shout from the savages, then a deafening clap like the first discharge of a peal of thunder, and with that there fell on us a terrible darkness, as if a cloud had suddenly hidden up the sun.

Then I counted our last moment had come, and with one last thought of my dear lady, I sprang to my feet and threw up my arms above her head, which was the mad folly of despair and no more, for my arms, had they been of iron or brass, must have bent and broken like reeds under the shock of such a vast mass.

As my hands touched the canvas it was torn down by a stone as big as a firkin, which, pitching into the sea, did raise a wave that half-filled the boat. Yet was I amazed that we yet lived, and perplexed to know what had become of the great rock, till, casting my eye up, I perceived it had stuck between the two walls of our fissure like a wedge, and so hung suspended over us. But it was fearful to observe, through the cloud of dust that filled the cove, how this monstrous block did now and then break from its hold, with a noise like a great gun firing, as some portion of its edge splintered off, flying in fragments to the right and left, the great mass threatening with each rupture to give way and bury us beneath it at the bottom of the sea. Indeed, it was in my heart to wish it would descend at one sweep rather than come down little by little to our destruction, for the suspense and terror of watching our coming doom were most horrible and fearful.

Those above, seeing that it wanted but a little to dislodge it from its position, now began to hurl big stones upon it, as we could plainly tell by the sound which echoed from it, as the noise of a galloping horse upon a bridge strikes the ear of one below. And at each blow this rock crumbled and shattered at its edge, showering down rubble all around us. Lady Biddy clung trembling to my arm, and though it was frightful to a degree to stand there, helpless, watching the approach of death, yet could we not turn our eyes from it, nor think of aught else. Otherwise, had I made a bold stroke to escape by shoving out of the cleft into the open and running the gauntlet, maugre the arrows of the savages waiting for us without; but, indeed, we were paralyzed with fear, and I not less than Lady Biddy.

Of a sudden we heard the report of a musket, and instantly the babel of savage shouting and whooping was stilled as if by enchantment; nor were any more stones hurled down on the rock above us.

For a little space we stood feeble and trembling, as if spent with violent exertion; but the silence continuing, and the rock above ceasing to labor, I plucked up heart, and bethought me to get out of that cove, no matter what befell us afterwards. So in a twinkling I loosed the boat, and, shoving out of the cleft, I turned about and drew through the narrow opening and out of the shadow of that accursed rock. And being now in the open we saw nothing of the Indians, but only their canoes lying up on the beach about a quarter of a mile to the east; neither were any of those heathens to be seen on the top of the cliff whence the great rock had been hurled down. This would have struck us with wonder and excited our curiosity at any other time, but just then we had no room in our breasts to harbor any feeling but that of profound and devout gratitude for our marvelous preservation. Looking at me very tenderly, Lady Biddy clasped her hands in her lap and bowed her head, while I, resting my arms on the oars, drew a deep breath which my lungs did seem sorely to need, for, as it seemed to me, I had not drawn breath freely for many hours.

While we sat thus, the boat gently tossing on the waves, I heard a voice hailing us, and turning about I spied a couple of men, decently clothed and armed with muskets like good Christians, standing amidst the rocks to the west of the cove. Seeing they were perceived, they held up their hands and beckoned us to draw nigh.

"It is they who have saved us from the savages," cries Lady Biddy with joy; "they are friends."

"That remains to be seen," says I, still resting on my oars and regarding them. "To my mind they look very like Spaniards."

"And if they are, may we not trust them, Benet?" says she, with some concern.

"I am of two minds about it," says I; "and for my own part I should feel just as content to pull out of reach of their muskets as to get within reach of their swords."

"Nay, you have a sword also, Benet, and are a match for two such little fellows as they."

"There are but two as we can see, that's certain," says I; "but we know not how many may lurk within call. Englishmen they are not, I will vow."

"Nor pirates," says Lady Biddy, as much as to tell me that all Englishmen are not angels.

"No," says I; "but they may be no better than pirates. In a word, I do fear they may turn out to be friends of Rodrigues from that town he spoke of."

"As you will, Benet," says she; "but," she adds, with a sigh, "they look very civil, pretty little fellows."

I hesitated still; for though I was dearly tempted to yield to Lady Biddy's evident desire, yet I knew that I was answerable for her life and welfare.

The men hailed us again, and one turned his musket upside down, while the other pulls out his white handkerchief and waves it in sign of peace.

"I do think they are Italian," says Lady Biddy, with hope lighting up her eyes again.

That decided me, and so, forgetting her welfare, I pulled towards the rocks to prevent those sweet eyes filling with tears, which was a weak part to be played by a strong man, and nothing to my credit.

Coming to the rocks, yet standing off a little from the shore, we began a parley; but, Lord! we might have held our peace, for I could speak but English with a smattering of Dutch. They tried one or two tongues that were without meaning to our ears, and Lady Biddy got on no better with speaking French and Italian. However, this jargon did so tickle us that we could not help but laugh, which put us in good humor one with another; so, to cut a long story short, taking their gestures to mean that they would die rather than injure a hair of our heads, and that they sought only to lead us to where we might get good treatment and run no risk of being further molested by savages, we resolved to put ourselves in their hands; so, running the boat ashore in a convenient part, we landed, and after I had buckled on my sword we signed to our friends to lead the way.

Near to that spot was a path cut in the cliff, and coming to the top we found ourselves in a fine level country, stretching away to the hills behind which rose the mountains. This champaign was cultivated with a kind of corn and divers other crops of strange plants, which comforted us with the hope of getting Christian entertainment. A fairly good path lay between the fields and the edge of the cliff, and this we followed in an easterly direction, passing that part where the barbarians had thrust down the rock upon us, as also a little village of huts hard by where the canoes were stranded. Pointing down at these huts our guides gave us to understand in dumb show that the savages were slaves, and would surely be punished for their attempt upon our lives; indeed, on our way we saw above a score of armed men amidst the corn following the furrows, to see if any of those wretches lay hid there, and heard many a yell as they were dragged to light and carried off to be whipped.

These cries did pierce Lady Biddy's tender and forgiving heart, and she urged many good reasons for their excuse: as that we must not expect mercy from those whom we treat without pity; that they must look upon all white people as their enemies and oppressors, since, but for us, they would still be free and happy in their native woods; that as it is our instinct to destroy the reptile or brute that would do us harm, so was it natural to them for their own preservation to take the lives of such as might one day become their tyrants, and sunder the wife from her husband, the child from its parent, for their own mercenary ends, etc., which gentle arguments did greatly soften that evil spirit of vengeance that stirred within me.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN WHICH PROVIDENCE, NOT TO BE ALWAYS SCOURGING OF US, PROVIDES US WITH GOOD ENTERTAINMENT.

After marching best part of an hour we came to a storehouse and farm, where our guide procured mules (to Lady Biddy's great relief and my contentment), and with this help we came about eleven o'clock to a small town, build on the side of a hill, at the mouth of a fair river, and covered by a stout fortress; and here were we conducted at once to the house of the governor, which stood in the midst of a fine garden, as pretty a seat as one could hope to see in such an outlandish part. After waiting in the courtyard, where we dismounted, some little while, the servant who had carried a message from our two friends (as I may call those fellows to whom we owed our lives) came back, and led us through a gateway into the midst of the garden, where on a fair green lawn, under the shade of a striped sheet of silk, fastened with colored cords (very fine) to high palmettos at the four corners of the green, sat half a dozen gentlemen and a lady about a table, on which was spread a repast that set my mouth watering. The gentlemen were all very handsomely dressed in the Spanish mode, and the lady (who was the governor's wife) was also very richly arrayed in a lace farthingale, but as ugly a woman of fifty or thereabouts as ever I did see; and particularly insolent, for ere we had got near her by five yards she held up her hand to bid us stay; and, clapping a scent-bottle to her hooky nose, put on an expression of loathing and disgust, as though we had been dirty dogs.

This disdain, however, was by no means obvious in the rest of the company, who, taking but slight notice of me, did gaze at Lady Biddy as though they would stare her out of countenance; so that I know not if I was better pleased with their impudence than with the old tabby's insolence.

The governor, who was as handsome as his wife was ordinary, with a snow-white beard and mustaches, but jet black eyebrows over his soft dark eyes, made a slight inclination of his head to Lady Biddy (as much as he dared in his wife's presence), and, turning to our friends, spoke to them, asking (as I guess) how we had fallen into their hands: whereupon the fellows, with their hats in their hands, very humbly laid the whole matter before him, the gentlemen listening with growing astonishment, glancing from the speakers to me, and then to Lady Biddy, while the governor's wife, fanning herself with a tuft of marabout, from time to time put in a word to our disadvantage, as I conceived by her gestures. When the men had made an end of their history, the governor, turning to me spoke a word or two in Portuguese—for I learnt afterwards that all the company were Portugals—to which I answered in English till he stopped me with a shrug of his shoulders, when I tried him in low Dutch; but he only shook his head at that. Then Lady Biddy, in her sweet, clear voice, ventured a word or two in Italian, as being something like the language he spoke. Upon which the governor, with a very amiable smile, replied in the same tongue, and my lady proceeded in telling our story.

And now was I heartily glad I had not made myself understood; for I must have made a sad bungling business of it in comparison with her performance. I knew not a word of what she said, yet could I not sufficiently admire her noble calm, her easy self-command, her graceful tone and gestures, and fearless mien.

I might have pleaded for compassion; she did nothing of the kind. She told of the wrong we had suffered with no mournful note, but with a tone of contempt for those who were so base as to abandon the respect due to her. She spoke in another key of the attack made by the barbarians, for they were rather to be pitied for a savage cruelty sprung from their misfortunes: she turned with a gracious inclination of her head to the two men in acknowledging their courtesy, and then, facing the governor's wife, she seemed to be demanding of her the courtesy of one lady towards another; and in conclusion, with a deep curtsy, thanked the governor in advance for the hospitality which the representative of a proud king would undoubtedly extend to the unfortunate subjects of a brother-sovereign thrown upon his coast.

I knew, I say, not one word of the tongue she spoke; yet had I been as proficient in the language as she, I could not have better understood that which she was saying, and this simply by the consummate eloquence of her manner.

Her speech ended, the governor rose, and before he spoke placed his chair for her use, standing erect until the servant ran forward with another chair for him and one for me. Indeed, her speech had a marvelous effect upon the whole company. The governor's lady absolutely smiled upon us—for Lady Biddy had not omitted to state that she was noble by birth, and that I was her cousin—and the gentlemen, taking shame for their impudence, were now less prepared to meet her eyes than she theirs. All this did comfort me greatly to perceive, and my heart swelled with pride for that I was the companion of such an excellent and beautiful lady.

The governor, being seated, made a little speech in an amiable tone, which Lady Biddy at once translated to me, that he might see I was to be her partner in good fortune as I had been in ill; and the gist of his matter, divested of fine compliments, was that as soon as he had properly fulfilled his personal duty as a host, he should take proper means to convey us to our country.

"Tell him," says I, "that though I shall be happy to leave his roof a debtor, yet I do fear we shall have to cry quite before I go."

Lady Biddy looked perplexed, but she gave my message.

"The governor wishes to know," says she, when he had replied, "what you imply by your message, and so do I," adds she, in the same tone.

"Ask him if he knows a man with pointed teeth named Rodrigues."

After a little consideration among the company, the governor replied through Lady Biddy that he knew no one with pointed teeth.

"Tell him," says I again, "that Rodrigues is the pirate from whom we escaped; that he is an excellent navigator as ever sailed the sea, and knows this coast by heart; wherefore I do think by his anchoring half a dozen leagues off to search for water, instead of coming in here for refreshments—which had been the simpler and surer means—that he harbors some sinister design upon the riches of this town."

The governor looked grave on hearing this, and his lady set to crossing herself and calling on her saint for succor. Presently the governor replied.

"I am to tell you," says Lady Biddy, "that Dom Sebastian d'Estovalderos is prepared to meet any foe, and fears none. At the same time he thanks you for your hint, and I think by his manner the old gentleman will be very glad of a few more."

"Tell him," says I, "that I could not presume to offer advice to a Portugal and a soldier, with any other flattery you think proper; but I should feel more sure of my own skin if he would send out spies along the coast to the west to warn us of the pirate's movements."

Dom Sebastian took this in very good part, and at once gave orders to the men who had brought us in, and they departing at once, he eagerly asked if he could make any other arrangement to increase my sense of security.

I bade Lady Biddy let him know that Rodrigues was a man of extreme subtlety and a crafty villain, who, understanding the temper of the savages towards their masters, might secretly stir them up to rebellion with a view to diverting attention from his attack, and that therefore I should feel easier if the naturals were for a time deprived of their bows and arrows.

The governor vowed they should all be sent in irons up the country at the first approach of Rodrigues, but that, as to their bows, it was impossible to find where they kept them adding that to conceal these cherished arms they had so quickly scattered at the first musket-shot of his factors. Further, he wished to know what else he could do for me.

"Tell him," says I, getting weary of this business, "that I will let him know while I am eating if any other precaution occurs to my mind; but that, before anything else, I would be glad to have a basin of water and a clean shirt."

I know not how Lady Biddy suggested this, but certain it is that, after a few more civilities were exchanged a lackey led me off to one part of the house, while Mistress Sebastian herself carried Lady Biddy to another. And here was I waited on hand and foot, my old suit stripped off, and a very handsome dress laid out for me, which the governor begged I would accept until his tailor could make me a better; and while one fellow was tying my garters and buckling my shoes, another was pointing my beard and cropping my head in the Spanish fashion. In fine, betwixt one and the other, I was so changed that when I came to look in the glass I did not know myself for Benet Pengilly. But I was not displeased with my appearance; nay, on the contrary—to tell the truth—I was as vain of myself as any coxcomb, and if I had possessed it, I would freely have given a piece to the fellow who trimmed my head, and another to him who had tied my garters, etc. And now I went out into the garden with a strut and a flourish, as though this bravery was naught to me, though my heart was all of a flutter to know how Lady Biddy would take my looks.

She had not yet descended when I came to the company, who were all laying their heads together very close in discussion, standing in a knot some way from the table, which was laid out with a very elegant repast.

Seeing me approach, the gentlemen broke off their conversation, and Dom Sebastian made a sign that I should sit down to table, but this I would not do in the absence of Lady Biddy, albeit I was very sharp-set. Presently she came from the house with the governor's lady. I made them a prodigious fine bow, and they curtsied to me; and was flattered to the top of my bent to perceive how my lady did regard me from the corner of her eye with pleasure and approval.

She also had changed her torn frock for a gown of black silk, and with this she wore a kerchief of lace thrown loosely over her head, which, like a dark setting to a fair pearl, did add to the lustre of her delicate skin and sparkling eyes—if it be possible to increase the beauty of that which in itself is perfect; in a word, she did ravish the eye.

And if those Portugals had before admired her, disheveled and ill-arrayed, there is no word to express their regard now. A little murmur arose amongst them as she gracefully took her seat at the table; and while one betook himself to get a posey for her bosom, and another set a cushion for her feet, the rest clustered around her like bees about a honey-bloom, offering her delicacies from the store set before us.

Lady Biddy was pleased to receive this homage, and, despite the accursed jealousy of my nature, I bore them no ill-will for their attentions to her, feeling that I was as good as any grandee amongst them, and better in my dear Lady Biddy's esteem.

After we had eaten to our heart's content, the governor very politely offered me some tobacco, which there they do not use in pipes, but rolled up in sticks about the bigness of a farthing candle, which tobacco is very excellent smoking indeed; and so,

being risen, the governor gave his arm to Lady Biddy, and we strolled to that part of the grounds which commanded a wide view of the town, the river, and the sea beyond.

At that moment a runner came in, sweating with haste, to tell that a ship was in sight; but we needed not his warning, for I had already spied in the distance a sail which I knew at a glance for the *Black Death*.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SPEEDY END IS BROUGHT TO OUR CIVIL ENTERTAINMENT.

Lady Biddy was greatly cast down when she caught sight of the black ship, as well she might be, for it seemed as if there were to be no more rest for her, body or mind. After standing in sad silence for a minute or two, she says to me:

"Benet, you must never yield to me again; if I had not persuaded you from your purpose, we should have escaped this present peril."

"Here is nothing," says I, "but what confirms my good opinion of your judgment."

"Nay," says she, "did you not tell Dom Sebastian that Rodrigues would come here?"

"To be sure, I don't want Rodrigues to catch Dom Sebastian unprepared; but as for our peril, I don't value it a snap of my fingers."

Hearing the name of Rodrigues coupled with his own, the governor, who had been eyeing us pretty shrewdly, stepped forward, and after apologizing for the intrusion, begged Lady Biddy to serve as our interpreter, and ask me whether I felt any anxiety with regard to my position; whereupon the following dialogue ensued:

I: "We may all go to bed and sleep comfortably to-night. But 'twill not do to lie abed to-morrow morning."

He: "You do not apprehend any immediate attack from the pirate?"

I: "No; for the reason that he is not in a position to offer it. You see how he has been making for the shore, and how now he is standing out; that shows that the wind is all against him, but it also proves his design to come hither."

He: "Why?"

I: "Because the ship's company are famished, and would never consent to work the ship at such a snail's pace unless Rodrigues could make them believe there was a town here to furnish them with all they need. They are not making half a league an hour. Unless the wind shifts to their advantage—and I see no likelihood of that—they will not be here ere midday to-morrow."

He: "What, in your opinion, will Rodrigues do then?"

I: "He will do his best to hoodwink and deceive you."

He (bending his brows): "And when he finds that Dom Sebastian d'Estovalderos is not to be hoodwinked?"

I: "Then he will seek to get what he wants by force. Neither he nor his men will go away unsatisfied."

He: "He may be satisfied to go away with what he does not want. My guns are not toys."

I: "I hope with all my heart he may under-rate them to his cost. It is more likely, however, that he will stand well out of their reach. He is hardy, but he is prudent. Be assured he would rather murder us all in our beds than venture an open encounter."

At this, Mistress Sebastian, who also understood the Italian a little, set up a shrill scream, and, after feeling about her person in great concern, called a servant who waited hard by, and bade him run at once to the house for her beads. The governor himself was too concerned to take much heed of his lady's agitation, though his pride kept him in good countenance.

He: "Are there any measures that you think it advisable to take?"

I: "I would have stout beams chained together, and thrown across the river from one side to the other to prevent an enemy's boat slipping past the guns of the fortress; also I should propose to send your lady, and anything else you value, to some place of security out of the town; finally, I would set up a gallows on the top of your citadel to be seen by Rodrigues, and at his first approach let him know that you will hang without mercy upon it him or the first of his company that comes within your reach."

He: "You have nothing else to recommend?"

I: "Nothing."

He (with a penetrating glance of his quick eye): "How is it you have not thought of defending that part of the town by which you entered, and the part most likely to be attacked by an enemy who has the discretion to perceive that his boats and men would be swept from the water by my guns if he were to venture an assault by the river?"

I: "Because that defence would not be omitted by you or a less experienced general in the face of any ordinary foe; I only venture to advise you on those points which might escape you in dealing with an enemy whose subtlety is best known to me."

The governor expressed himself quite satisfied with this explanation; but I could see, nevertheless, that he was inclined to eye me with suspicion for having neglected to recommend the fortification of the town on the western side, thinking, maybe, that I was no enemy to Rodrigues, but his friend, come there with a plausible tale to divert his defense from the weaker side. This, indeed, was a very ridiculous thing to imagine; yet there is nothing too absurd to be entertained of a suspicious man; and, certainly, no men do fear treachery more than these same Portugals, albeit they themselves are a match for all the world at lying and deceit.

Despite his boast that the guns of his castle could sweep the water of all enemies, he did not neglect the advice I had given him. Divers great masts were bound to a chain, and this laid across the river, firmly secured at either end. Within this barrier lay a long galley ship, and all the rest of the day slaves were employed in carrying goods and merchandise from the governor's house into this galley. Besides this, a great train of pack-mules was sent up into the country with other treasure. Everywhere there was great bustle and commotion, for the merchants and others who dwelt in the town, getting wind of the danger, were as anxious to have their goods out of the pirate's reach as the governor his; nay, so eager were they to preserve the least valuable part of their property that they would have departed with their goods and left the governor alone to meet the enemy, but that Dom Sebastian did threaten to hang at the first opportunity any man capable of bearing arms for the defense of the town who should fail to answer the summons of his trumpeter.

As long as there was light to see, my anxious eyes were strained to watch the approach of the black ship. By sunset she had got near enough for us to descry with a perspective that her sails were being furled, which showed she had cast anchor for the night. So, feeling that we were perfectly safe for the next ten or twelve hours, I for one made no scruple to accept the bed offered to me, for such a luxury was not to be denied by one who had not felt a cool sheet for an age.

The first thing that entered my head when I awoke in the morning was a remembrance that we had left the boat that belonged to the *Black Death* high and dry on the shore where we had landed after our escape from the naturals, which must surely be seen by Rodrigues in searching the shore with his glass, and thus betray us to him. Cursing my want of forethought, I slipped into my clothes as nimbly as I could, and started to go to the citadel, where I counted on seeing the governor. But on my way thither I was suddenly brought to a stand by the reflection that I could not make him understand a word of what I wanted. What was I to do? If I went back to arouse Lady Biddy to come and serve as interpreter, I must of a certainty lose time. Every moment was precious. It struck me that if I made good use of my legs I could get to the boat in an hour, stave a hole in the bottom of it, shove it out to sea, and so be quit of this plaguy evidence; and it being yet pretty early, I counted I might fairly do this before Rodrigues had come within boat-reach of the spot. Anyway, I esteemed it would be best to try and do this of my own hand rather than wait until a lengthy explanation of the matter could be made to the governor through Lady Biddy; so, without more ado, I turned out of the road to the citadel by that path we had come by the day before, and took to my heels as swiftly as I could. But ere I had come to the town-gate a couple of fellows, springing out into the road, crossed their bills in front of me, shouting for help; whereupon, in a twinkling, half a score of others with pike and musket ran up and laid hands on me. It was useless to cry out against this violence, for not one amongst them could make out what I said; so of necessity was I forced to yield patiently, and go whither they chose to lead me. So, like any criminal thief, was I carried to the citadel, where the governor stood with his friends looking out to sea.

I made him a bow, and with a shrug, after their manner, and a smile, I pointed to my captors.

Dom Sebastian replied to my salute very stiffly; but as for the rest, though we had all been as friendly over a bottle and tobacco-sticks as so many brothers the night afore, they took no more notice of me, except to stare violently, than if they had just clapped eyes on me for the first time. The men who had stopped me told their tale—as how I was running out of the town as fast as my legs could carry me, and the rest, which I could follow pretty closely by reason that these Portugals do suit the action to the word most admirably.

When the governor had listened, like any stock of wood for stiffness, to their history, he spoke a few words to one of the fellows, which were, I take it, to bid him fetch Lady Biddy; and then with another stiff bow to me, turned on his heel, leaving me still in the hands of the musketeers, and goes with his friends to the parapet to note the advance of the black ship.

Now I was vexed in the extreme, but with no one more than myself; for, had the governor been no Portugal, yet must it have aroused his suspicion that I should be caught, the first thing in the morning, running away from the town in the direction of the enemy without giving any word of explanation or farewell.

I had ample time, as I waited there, to look about me. The *Black Death* I saw not above a couple of leagues off, having taken advantage betimes of the favorable breeze that had sprung up after the stillness of the night. This put me in mind that I should have done well to assure me of where the enemy was before I started on my mad journey, for he was already past the spot where the boat lay; but, indeed, when a man is flurried he is capable of any folly, and he never commits one without entailing another.

The governor and his friends continued in close conversation—doubtless discussing my behavior—until Lady Biddy came breathless to my side. Seeing me under arrest, her face was filled with alarm, and any one might see that her perplexity was unfeigned; yet I doubt if this removed the suspicion of my treachery.

"What does this mean, Benet?" asks Lady Biddy, when she could fetch her breath.

"Nay," says I, "that is the question I want you to ask Dom Sebastian."

The governor, who had drawn nigh, saluting Lady Biddy with the utmost civility, explained to her that I had been caught attempting to run out of the town, "And in that direction," adds he, pointing to the black ship.

In a few words I told how this came to pass, the governor eyeing us the while as if he would look into our very hearts. Happily he seemed to see that we were innocent, for the moment he heard Lady Biddy's account he bade the men unhand me, and begged her to tell me that he was sorry I had brought myself into this scrape, added that he should be glad to know how I came to forget that I had left the boat there.

To this I replied that I could say nothing in defense of my oversight.

"I trust," says he, "the senhor will not get himself into further trouble by a like accident. Had I not remembered the boat and got it removed, it would have served as a sure indication to the enemy that there was a path from that point by the cliff."

I felt that I deserved this reproach; nay, I was rather surprised at the governor's moderation, for, granting that I might be a knave, there was evidence enough against me to justify a halter being put about my neck.

"I am the more concerned for your cousin's prudence," continues he, "because in an hour's time you will no longer be under my protection."

"How, your excellency?" cries Biddy. "Are you going to send us hence?"

"Under a proper escort," says he, "who will insure your safe conduct to a point on the river whither my wife has already gone in the galley."

I had resolved to discharge my debt to the governor by fighting at his side, if Rodrigues attacked the town; but now by his manner I perceived so clearly that we were being sent away because he mistrusted us, that I thought better of it and made no offer of my services.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

WE SET OUT FOR THE INTERIOR, AND I FALL INTO MY JEALOUS HUMOR ONCE MORE.

Having taken formal leave of the governor, whose duty kept him to the citadel, we returned to the house, where we had barely finished our meal when a gentleman came to us in great haste, telling us the black ship was casting anchor, and it was high time to be jogging.

Our escort was waiting in the courtyard, and we set out, a company of thirteen, with the like number of mules.

Our commander was a Portugal named Lewis de Pino, and, as luck would have it, he spoke Italian passably; besides him, there were ten other Portuguese footmen, each armed with an arquebuse, a sword, and a good supply of powder and ball, hung on their bandalieros. Three of the mules—sleek, well-conditioned beasts, and very bravely caparisoned—served to carry Lady Biddy, the commander, and myself; the rest bore pack-saddles well charged with stores.

We crossed the champaign, and there struck into the woods by a trodden path with a pleasant shade of trees. We traveled this way until noon, when, being come to a convenient spot, we dismounted, and there made a very excellent repast from our stores; after which we reposed until the great heat of the day was past, and then pushed on again.

About five o'clock we came to an opening in the woods, whence we could see the river winding through the valley below, but no sign of the galley which should be there waiting for us. Whereupon Senhor Lewis, who spoke the Italian, seeming to fall into a great pet, declared that this was a trick of the governor's lady to gratify her spleen against Lady Biddy, which had been only too evident from the very first.

"Now," says he, "I perceive why she was so anxious to start off betimes, and why she urged that you, being unused to traveling on these rivers, could never endure the teasing of the flies that do infest the water, and so should go as far as you might by road."

"Our mules are still fresh," says Lady Biddy; "can not we get to our destination by following this road still further?"

"Nay," says he, "for Dom Sebastian's seat, where he designed you should stay with his lady until it might be safe to return to Castello Lagos, lies yet some distance up the river, and is only to be reached by boat from the point below. For the river winds one way, and this road the other; nor is there any other means of getting at it that I know of. But I will make sure of this by questioning the men, who know these parts better than I."

While he was parleying with his men, Lady Biddy narrated this conversation to me, and, as she was saying the last words, he comes back, still feigning to be greatly vexed.

"I am sorry to tell you, madam," says he, "that my men, one and all, agree with me there is no road to the governor's seat; so I see nothing for it but to divide my company, and give you one half to cover your return to Castello Lagos."

"But why divide the company?" says Lady Biddy in alarm; "surely you will return with us?"

"Nothing would give me greater joy," says he, "but I am only a poor merchant, and these are my possessions" (with his head in his shoulders and his hands extended towards the company of footmen and mules). "I offering you half my servants, I jeopardize as much as I can afford, for I doubt if I shall see e'er a one of 'em alive again."

When Lady Biddy had translated this to me, she says, in a tone of terror:

"If he does not expect his men to save their lives in returning to the town, how may we hope to escape? We can not return thither. Oh, Benet, what shall we do?"

I was myself prodigiously taken aback, and not a little scared, by this new turn of affairs; yet, seeing how my dear lady was upset, I tried to calm her mind by making light of the matter.

"Be of good cheer," says I; "we will for certain not go back to this Castello Lagos, for if the Portugal will not venture his carcase there, I will assuredly not risk mine. Nay, you should know, cousin," I adds, feeling a little sore for reasons that I shall presently explain, "that I treasure your safety more than this man does his merchandise. I see through this rogue of a merchant, who, as likely as not, has contrived this difficulty for his own profit. Do you ask the fellow such questions as I would put to him."

"With all my heart," says Lady Biddy, "What shall I ask him, Benet?"

"Ask him if he be a merchant of Castello Lagos," says I, putting on a pretty determined air.

To this Lewis de Pino replied that he was a merchant of Valerias, whither he was now going. "Valerias," says I, pretending to be mighty knowing, that he might not perceive my ignorance, "that lies betwixt here and Caracas, I take it."

He replied yes, but after looking at me in silence a minute, as though to make out what I was driving at.

"And Caracas," says I, in the same tone, "is t'other side of those mountains?"

"Preciseamento!" says he, with a grin, holding up his hand with the tips of his thumb and second finger joined.

"How far is it to Valerias?" I asked.

"About six days' journey," says he in reply.

"And from Valerias to Caracas is no great matter," says I still, as if I knew the road well enough.

"The senhor knows that it is no distance at all," says he.

"Good," says I; "then, as our object is to get back to England rather than to trespass upon Dom Sebastian's hospitality, you shall carry us with you, for which service you shall be well paid. You shall have my bond for any reasonable sum."

He would have it that he needed no recompense, but I could see plainly that he was very well pleased with this turn, which did further convince me the matter was planned beforehand.

We pushed on till dusk, when we reached a collection of wooden huts, walled in with a palisade of stout wooden spikes, crossed in the manner of the letter X, and the spaces so stuffed with thorns and prickly herbs that no man (least of all a naked savage) could go either in or out, save by the postern gate at one side. In the midst of these huts stood a stone tower, pierced with little holes in the upper part, for the use of muskets in case of attack, as I thought.

We saw no women or children in this village, but only about a dozen wild, fierce Portugals, each with a long knife stuck in his girdle; and one, who seemed to have just returned from the chase, had his musket slung on behind to his bandeliero, and was dressed in a jerkin, breeches, and gaiters of leather. With their ragged beards, their sun-burnt skins, and savage air, they looked like so many brigands; yet were they as courteous as lackeys to us, helping us to dismount, and providing us with all that was necessary to our comfort. Most of the houses were mere sheds, used for the storing of powder, food, etc., for these Portugals, as I learnt, were hunters, who never slept under a roof except in the rainy season; but there was one well furnished and provided with sleeping-rooms to serve for the accommodation of the merchants, who came from time to time to truck their merchandise for the spoils brought hither by the hunters.

When we had supped, Lady Biddy, being fatigued with the day's journey, betook herself to her room, and I, having no inclination for society, lay myself down in a net hung from two beams in the roof, which is their manner of sleeping in these parts, and the first I had ever seen of such strange bed-places. There was a second net in this chamber for Lewis de Pino; but he, having business to do with the hunters, that we might start betimes the next morning, went out and joined them elsewhere, so that I was left alone to my meditations.

And here I took myself to task, as well I might, for having misbehaved myself in a very pitiful, paltry sort towards Lady Biddy from the first moment we set out on our journey. To make an honest confession, I had allowed myself once more to come under the dominion of that abominable jealousy which was my besetting vice. For this Lewis de Pino was one of those gallants we had discovered seated with Dom Sebastian on our arrival at Castello Lagos, and the most persistent in passing his addresses to my lady; nay, he was so smitten with her charms that his eyes did seem to devour her as often as he looked at her. I had observed him more than once talking apart with the governor very earnestly: once touching hands as if on a bargain; and from this I concluded that we had been sold in a manner by the governor to Lewis de Pino to further the amorous designs of the latter upon Lady Biddy. Now this conviction should have drawn me closer to her as a friend and protector, and so it would, but I took it into my head that she looked too kindly on him.

In crossing the champaign she took no notice of him whatever, being concerned for our safety, and fearing Rodrigues would get upon our track ere we got to a place of safety; and all this while she was very silent and preoccupied, turning in her saddle now and again to look back, and asking me if I thought we should yet escape, etc., all in a very troubled and grave manner; but being come into the wood, and greatly relieved of her anxiety, she grew, as it was natural she should, very suddenly gay and sprightly. Just at that time Lewis de Pino came to her side with a compliment in Italian, which, as I say, he spoke indifferently well, and this brought the smile to her cheek.

"She has not smiled on me since we bade each other good-morning," says I to myself. "Nay, she would scarcely accept for a truth my assurance of her safety; yet the moment this grinning Portugal comes to her side she forgets our peril and is blithe."

So we continued our way; he one side of my lady chatting and smiling, and I on the other glum and mumchance. Nor did I speak a single word for half an hour, when she says, turning to me with the smile Lewis de Pino had brought to her face:

"Have you nothing to say, Benet?"

On this, feeling ashamed to acknowledge the truth, I sought to excuse myself with a lie.

"I am thinking," says I, "of our peril, which is none of the least."

"Why," says she, "what have we to fear now? That man will never surely pursue us hither."

"No," says I; "very likely not; but I have heard no sounds of firing, and I do fear the governor, despite my warning, has yielded to some cunning artifice of Rodrigues; who by threat or torture may persuade him to fetch us back with his soldiery."

She translated my fears to Lewis de Pino, who replied that Dom Sebastian would perish in flames rather than be guilty of treachery.

"And I think so likewise," added Lady Biddy, when she had rendered this, "for these Portugals have nobility stamped in their features."

"Ay," says I, "and cruelty stamped on their lips, and wickedness in their eyes as well."

"As for that," says she, laughing, "we are not all Puritans. You must admit," added she, with a malicious twinkle in her eye, for I fancy she perceived the secret of my dislike and would pique me for a punishment—"you must admit Senhor Lewis is a very handsome man."

"Yes," says I; "but I like him none the better for that."

Presently we came to a part where, the path growing narrower, there was room but for two to go abreast, and here Lewis de Pino, taking off his hat, made as though he would yield his place to me; but I, not to be outdone in civility, gave him back his salute and fell behind.

There were abundance of beauteous flowers and gay-plumed birds and curious growths on either side to please the eye and interest the mind; but I could not take my eyes off the two faces before me, turned towards each other, and flushed with pleasure.

"And why," I asked myself, as I lay in my net brooding on these things—"why should she not be pleased with the courteous and lively attentions of a well-favored and good-tempered companion? Had I made myself agreeable, instead of sitting like any stock for stupidity, she would have smiled on me. This was the first moment of ease, the first opportunity of pleasant conversation with one of her own degree, that she had enjoyed for many a day. Granted his talk, as you would believe in your prejudice and ignorance, was trivial, might it not yet have been amusing? Wouldn't you, Benet, rather sit an hour listening to the jests of a Merry Andrew than wait half as long for an oracle to deliver itself?"

But my lady, for all her amusement, did think of me—ay, I believe she was concerned for my silence and grieved at my moody humor. Perhaps she repented having wounded my feelings by treating my gravity lightly. Still, she had too much spirit, too much proper pride, to humble herself by asking forgiveness; nay, delicate consideration for my feelings might have withheld her from humiliating me by taking my folly seriously. Nevertheless, I say, she did think of me, and turning now and then pointed out to me some sweet flower or pretty bird. And how did I make a return for this gentle kindness? By answering in a cavalier and careless manner that was particularly detestable.

All these reflections came to my mind, I say, as I lay in the dark; and so I fell a-tormenting myself with reproaches to such a degree that had I been ten times as tired I could not have closed an eye.

Some time after, Lewis de Pino, a little the worse for liquor, as I judged, came into the chamber, clambered up into his net, and fell a-snoring like any pig, so that, maugre my condition, I did wish Lady Biddy could hear him.

I was still lying wide awake, thinking what a hound I was, when suddenly there fell upon my ear a sound like a woman wailing in grief. I could not believe this until I heard the sound a second time. Then I started on the instant to my feet, knowing there was no woman there but Lady Biddy; but forgetting the kind of bed in which I lay, and how no man but a rope-dancer could stand up in such a thing safely, I swung on one side and came down with a spank on the floor. At that noise, Lewis de Pino awoke with a grunt, but he fell asleep with another the next minute; and now, coming to my feet, I heard again that mournful, sorrowing cry. The door stood wide open. Outside all was still. Not a breath of air moved the leaves of the trees. The big stars looked down very peacefully. In the distance I saw the Portugals lying on the ground asleep like so many dogs; but nothing moved.

Then, again, as I stood there, my heart was pierced with the distant moan. I crept to the hut where Lady Biddy lay, and, tapping gently at the door, asked if she were in pain.

But she answered that it was not she who cried; at which my heart was comforted, for at the first I thought that maybe my sullen humor had moved her to tears.

So thinking the sound was but the note of a night-bird, of which there are many in these woods that have the most strange human voices of any living thing, I went back to my net, and presently fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AN EXPLANATION OF THAT CRY I HEARD IN THE NIGHT, WITH OTHER PERTINENT MATTER.

The next morning when we were mounted, and only waiting the order to start on our way, our ears were assailed by the piteous cry of a woman, which recalled to my mind the weeping I had heard in the night; but now the wailing was close at hand, coming from the midst of the huts where the tower stood. The next moment there sounded the sharp crack of a whip, followed by a scream of pain. At this the pretty color went out of Lady Biddy's cheek, and she called to Lewis de Pino, who stood talking with one of the hunters (and both as unconcerned as if they had been stone deaf), to know whence that cry came; but ere he could come smiling to her side to reply, the whole matter was explained by the appearance of five young Indian women bearing among them a long pole, to which they were attached by leather collars round their throats. The foremost of them was stanching her tears with her hands under the threat of the arquebusier conducting them, who had a short-stocked whip with a long lash in his hand, with which he tapped her shoulder menacingly as he spoke. These poor souls had never a bit of clothes on but a clout about their loins, and she who was trying to check her weeping had a long wheal across her neck, that stood out purple from her copper skin where the whip had fallen.

Lady Biddy was greatly shocked at the spectacle of this barbarity; nor could she smile on Lewis de Pino that day as she had the day before, which I was glad to observe; albeit he did all he could to set this matter in a fair light when we stopped at noon to dinner. He told her that slaves were one of the commodities he dealt in, and that if he did not occupy himself in this traffic another would, and maybe to their disadvantage, assuring her they were better treated at his hands than by their own kinsmen, who, of their own free will, brought their wives and daughters down to the station to sell them for knives, axes, beads, and the like; justifying himself by the opinion of some very pious writers that all things being created for the use of man, Providence did furnish the savage heathens to be servants of Christians for the cultivation of spices, sugars, and other things necessary to their comfort.

"But," says Lady Biddy, "if their case is better as slaves than as free women, why does that poor soul weep?"

"Why," says he, "my man was forced to use his whip because she strove to hang herself by the neck to the pole the others carried; and you must agree that in every country those are deservingly punished who attempt to end a life given them to be a blessing to their fellow-creatures."

"Nay," says Lady Biddy, "that is no answer to my question. She wept ere she tried to end her miserable life, for a certainty, and I would know why she wept."

Lewis de Pino, making inquiries on this, learnt that the young woman had but recently been wedded, and that her husband losing his life in battle, she had been sold by her father, who could not be burthened with her.

"So you see, madam," says he, when he had imparted this, "we treat them no worse than they would be treated if we did not exist. Nevertheless, 'tis a trade I would gladly abandon, for the sight of their suffering—which I can not ignore—unmans me for my business, so that I often pay more for these slaves than they are worth, merely to secure them from the ill-treatment they would receive were they returned upon the hands of those who would be rid of them. Nay, the sight of that poor creature's tears so moves me that I will, if it please you, order her collar to be unbolted and give her freedom."

This the sly rogue offered, knowing well that Lady Biddy would not consent to an act which he himself had shown would be the greater cruelty, and with the sole intent, I take it, to insinuate himself into my lady's good graces. All that she desired, therefore, was that the young woman should be placed on one of the pack-mules until she had recovered from the exhaustion into which her grief had thrown her. Whereupon Lewis de Pino, with as good grace as he could muster, ordered her leather collar to be unbolted, and a place to be made for her on one of the mules, making the young woman understand at the same time that it was by the wish of Lady Biddy that this indulgence was granted her. This she understood well enough, for being freed she rushes to Lady Biddy, embraces her knees, pressing her face against them; but this done, ere hand could be laid on her, she darted off with a cry like a startled blackbird into the wood.

Coming to a distance, she had yet so much feeling that gratitude rose in her bosom above the instinct of self-preservation, and she turned about, raising her arms in the air as if to bless Lady Biddy. At that moment, seeing her thus exposed, a Portugal cocks his musket, and, clapping it to his shoulder, fires at her; but by good chance I, standing not more than a yard off, was enabled by a quick movement to fling the fellow's arm up, whereby the ball passed harmlessly over her head. With another wild cry of joy she turned about and fled out of sight, nor did any of the Portugals attempt to follow her more than a score of yards or so, for loaded as they were with their arms, to pursue her, who was light on foot as any deer, was a profitless folly.

This business did not prove more clearly than words what a liar Lewis de Pino was, for surely the girl would not so joyously have recovered freedom if that was true that he told of the barbarity of her kinsfolk. But for all this he did persevere in defending himself as we continued our march, and, to my mortification, Lady Biddy allowed herself, as I judged by her manner, to be beguiled by his crafty tongue. So that I was not much better pleased with her this day than I had been the day before.

Indeed, it was past my comprehension how one of her understanding could fail to see that this Lewis de Pino, for all his good looks and fair speaking, was an arrant rascal; but that was no such extraordinary matter neither, for as the day began to draw in I began to doubt whether I had not suffered him to deceive me, who was by no means under the charm of his personal gifts. For, taking note of the position of the sun pretty frequently, and making all allowance for the turns of the path in winding amongst the mountains, I came to the conclusion that we had been traveling for these two days full south, and rather a point or so to the east of it than to the west. Then calling to mind as well as I could the look of the chart, it grew upon me that we were not making in the direction of Caracas at all, by reason that the chain of mountains there set down ran east and west, with Caracas lying not more than half a dozen leagues from the sea.

As this conviction became stronger, I was troubled beyond description, for to go back was out of the question; while to go on was to lay ourselves more inevitably in the power of Lewis de Pino. So, with a heart like any lump of lead, I laid me in my net that night; yet might I have counted myself a happy man at that time could I have foreseen the greater trouble that was to come, as I shall show in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I AM OVERCOME AND CLAPPED UP IN ONE OF THOSE STRONG TOWERS.

We set out from that station the next morning about seven o'clock with another pole of six slaves added to our number, and, toiling upwards, in about two hours we came out of the woods into a very wild, rocky country, where scarcely any herb grew for the height and abundance of stone. Sometimes the path wound along the edge of horrid precipices, and sometimes between prodigious high rocks, and this way I counted we crossed over a low chain of mountains; for about noon we began to descend again, but the road so steep and foul with loose stones that 'twas as much as the mules could do to keep their feet at times. As for the poor slaves, their pain was great indeed, by reason of being yoked to the poles one behind the other; for if one slipped she was as good as strangled in her collar; and if those behind could not keep pace with those before, they were like all to be thrown down. To see the sweat pouring down their dusky skins, the agony in their faces, the blood on their feet and legs cut by the sharp stones, was enough to melt any heart of stone. Yet that which did move me was their silence in the midst of their suffering; no herd of spent cattle could have shown more patient endurance.

An hour of sliding and stumbling brought us to a station at the bottom of this rocky valley; but it was unlike the other two, in having no trees around it, and a stone wall in place of a stockade; besides that, it was twice as big. The tower also was greater and stronger here, and the men had not that same aspect, but looked ten times more cruel and brutal. Every man of them carried arms, as if he mistrusted his fellows, and all had a very hang-dog look in their sullen faces. This, I take it, came partly of their living always in that grim, barren valley, where the sun never shone; and partly of their occupation, which was to goad on and watch over the slaves who worked mines in that region; for I observed that men's looks do take on the aspect of the surroundings and the character of the company they keep; and truly these fellows looked as sullen and forbidding as the rocks, with something of that dull, hopeless expression that marked the faces of their slaves.

After I had eaten my dinner (Lady Biddy having gone to her chamber to rest until it was time to set out again) I went to the door of the hut, and looking up saw Lewis de Pino in close conversation with a fellow who seemed to be the chief of the gang. When I saw how they lay their heads together, speaking low so that not a sound of their voices could I hear, my mind misgave me; but presently the rogue whom I called the chief goes up to the slaves and examines them, opening their eyes and pinching their flesh, as if to know if they were healthy or not; and then he takes Lewis de Pino to a box and shows him some pieces of metal, so that I concluded they were only trafficking their wares. Wherefore, being disgusted with the whole business, I turned my back on them, and flung myself on the net that hung in the hut, where I presently fell asleep.

How long I had lain there I know not (nor is it any great matter), but I was awoken rudely enough by four sturdy rascals laying hands on me at the same time that a fifth did cram a filthy clout in my mouth by way of gag. Seeing they meant to do me mischief, I put out all my strength to get free of their hands, and out of that accursed net on to the firm ground, where I might better defend myself; but all to no purpose, for the net gave no hold to my feet or vantage-point of any kind, so that I presently found myself bound hand and foot to my bed, with no more power to get out of it than if it had been my skin. And all this was done without so much as a word or any perceptible sound, for their feet were bare.

Seeing I was secure, they cut the cords that fastened the two ends of the net to the roof, and one fellow shouldering the end at my head and another that at my heels, they carried me out of the hut, and so jogged along pretty briskly till they reached the tower. Here the stairs being narrow and awkward, they flung me on the ground till they had tied a long cord to my feet, when four of them went to the head of the stairs, and pulling on to the cord with a will, they dragged me to the upper story like any bag of malt. From the landing they hauled me into a dim chamber, and there they left me to get out of my bonds as I might; going out by the door, which they barred and bolted close.

For a few moments I lay there stupefied by the rough usage I had been put to (for being dragged up heels foremost in the way I have described had thrown the blood into my head), but as my intelligence returned I saw that I had been clapped up in order that Lewis de Pino might carry off my Lady Biddy without opposition from me. No sooner did this idea come into my mind than I set to like a madman struggling to burst the cords that bound me; but this rash endeavor only drew the knots tighter, without breaking a strand of those hard ropes; yet was I made so frantic by the image of harm coming to my dear lady that I never paused to consider whether my strength might be better employed than in these vain efforts, nor heeded the wounds I inflicted on my own flesh, but still tore at the bonds with my bleeding wrists, as if my life depended on getting free; nay, I do believe that had a tiger been in that chamber, drawing near to tear me with his bloody fangs, I could have looked upon him with greater calm than I could support the image of my lady being borne away from me. So in a frenzy that grew with the conviction of my impotency rather than diminished, I labored as though I would tear my hands off to free my arms, until all my strength was spent, and I lay motionless, but for the throbbing of my chest, as I panted for breath. This brought me to a more reasonable state of mind, and as I got out of my faintness I began to wriggle my hands about without straining overmuch, and, thanks to the rope being made somewhat slippery with the blood from my wrists, I presently got one hand loose, and after that it was but a trifling matter (when I had freed my mouth from that beastly thing they had crammed in to gag me withal) to free the other, and after that my legs and ankles.

And now, seeing that I had done more to get my freedom by a ten minutes' patient endeavor than I had come, at in furiously struggling for the best part of an hour (and that without doing myself any mischief), I made up my mind to go about my business in a reasonable fashion henceforth. So getting on my legs I looked about me to find what part of my prison it was

easiest to break through; and this gave me but little comfort, for no part seemed weaker than the rest, but all alike prodigious stout and strong.

The four walls were of solid stone, with no opening save the door, and six narrow slits, no bigger than rifts for shooting arrows, to admit light, and they higher up than I could get at with my hand, standing on my toes. The roof sprang from the walls about fifteen feet from the floor, and the cross-beams were boarded over. But casting my eye this way and that way, I saw a chink of light here and there, which led me to think these boards were not nailed down, but laid loosely down for the convenience of making a cock-loft there, and also that the roof must have some opening for the light thus to creep through.

Now I thought that if I could once get into the cock-loft the affair would be best part done; for if there were no dormer window, yet might I shift the shingles or the tiles of the roof, and so make an opening wide enough to creep through; and I counted that those cords which had bound me, tied together with the net-bed, which might be cut into three strips, and yet have strength to bear my weight, would serve to let me down some part of the way to the ground. What I should do after I got to the ground I did not trouble myself to consider; the main thing was to get out of the tower safely.

The more I looked at the chinks above, the more I liked my project; but how to make my way up into the cock-loft, as I call it, was the plague. I passed my hands carefully over every part of the walls within reach, hoping to find some hole or cranny to climb up by; but the stones were all smooth and flush, so that a cat could not have climbed up them. Nor was there anything in the shape of furniture that I might build up for a ladder. There was naught within these four walls but myself and the net I had been trussed up in. Taking up one of the cords from the ground, and weighing it in my hand, I asked myself if I could by any means turn it to my purpose; after thinking some little while, it came into my mind that if I made a big knot at one end, and thrust it through one of the rifts so that it would hitch on the outer side of the wall, I might then make a loop or two in the loose end, by which I could raise myself against the wall to the height of the said rift, and so reach up to the loose boards, if loose they were, above. The scheme was wild enough, but as I saw no better I began at once to put it into execution.

First of all I chose the longer of the cords, and made two loops in it to serve me as stirrups; then, taking a piece of the net, I rolled it into a hard ball, about as big as I might thrust through the rift; and, having bound this about with another cord, I fastened it securely to my stirrups, with length enough, as I judged, to allow the ball to pass through to the outer edge of the wall, where I hoped it would hitch.

When I had done this to my satisfaction, I began to cast about how I was to get it through the rift, which was a difficulty I had not foreseen.

"If I had only a pole," says I to myself—"a pole about two yards long!" But, Lord! while I was about it I might just as well have wished for a step-ladder of three yards to carry me at once into the cock-loft. However, growing a little desperate to find myself thus baulked for want of a stick, I made a spring upward, and, getting my hand in the rift, I contrived to hang there some while; but as to dragging myself up so that I could get my knot through with my other hand, that I could not do, strive as I might; nor do I think it possible that any man, though he were lusty as Samson, could have compassed that business.

Now was I pretty well at my wits' end; yet, being of a stubborn nature, I would not allow myself to be beaten, and still clung to the notion of scaling the wall with my precious rope stirrups. But it was clear that I could do nothing without some sort of hold for my foot to rest on as I hung from the rift, and so once more I began to feel about the wall for a hole to set my toes in.

There was a joint in the stonework about four feet from the ground, where the mortar gave way under my nail, but the crack was not as wide as my finger. However, I had a clasp-knife in my pocket, which Dom Sebastian had given me (for the Portugals do never go about without such weapons for their defense), and with this I determined to cut away the stone if I might. So at it I went without more ado.

I had scarcely begun this toil when I heard some one ascending the stairs that led to my prison.

"Now," thinks I, "am I undone. For if they come in here and see my knotted rope, they will certainly take it from me, and there will be an end of my only hope."

The steps came nearer and stopped; then I heard the bar being taken down. Upon this, with the hope of exciting fear, I set up a most violent shout, as if I were beside myself with rage, and rushing to the door beat it furiously with my fists and feet, whereupon there was a silence outside, as if the fellow was considering whether he had not best leave me alone for the present; and that he had come to this conclusion was made evident presently by his clapping up the bar again. After this I heard a shuffling on the ground, and the next minute his steps, as he descended the stairs.

I was mightily pleased with myself at the success of my stratagem, and, going back to the wall, set to work again at cutting the stone with my knife.

I ground and scraped till the blade of my knife was as hot as fire, but when I examined the stone with my finger, to see if the hole were anything like big enough yet, I found that I had made no perceptible difference in it whatever, which did so vex me that I was ready to tear my hair, or commit any other extravagance. Then, casting my eyes at the wall where the light from the rift fell, I was terrified to observe how the shadow had shifted since I first began, so that I concluded it must be getting towards sundown, by which I reckoned I must have been four or five hours at this business, and was pretty near as far as ever from making my escape. Whereupon I was beset with a kind of rage, and, accusing myself of indolence, cut again at the stone with redoubled energy. The result of this mad haste was that the blade of my knife snapped in half before I had worked a couple of

minutes. Then I flung it down on the ground, and, resting my arm against the wall, I laid my face there, and could have wept for vexation.

But this was not to be endured for any time. Glancing again at the wall, it seemed to me the shadow had traveled a foot further.

"Every moment," says I to myself, "puts my lady further from me. Coward or fool! are you content to do nothing? Will you give up the hope of saving her because of a trifle? Have you no more heart and hardihood than this?"

With this, I picked up my knife again, and finding yet a couple of inches left of the blade, I once more set to work, but with more prudence. Yet every now and then would I turn to watch the shadow, saying to myself, "Now she is a league further away—she has been carried a full mile since last I looked," etc.

Sometimes my heart would grow heavy as stone with despair, as I noted the little effect I made; and then, that I might not lose courage, I would not feel what progress I had made, but ground on steadily, like the movement of a clock. But, though I did not tax my strength, the sweat streamed down my face and body, so that my shirt clung cold to my body with the wet from my skin, by reason of my anxiety.

After a while, when the light was sensibly fading, a faintness came upon me, and I felt dried up with thirst. Resting for strength to come, I bethought me that perhaps my jailer had no intention but to give me food when he came to the door. Then the hope led me to think that perhaps he had come back softly, and, hearing no sound, had ventured to open the door quietly, and slip a pitcher of water within for my comfort.

I went to the door, and, groping on the ground (for in that part it was very dark), I laid my hand on a loose piece of paper. It occurred to me in an instant (so quickly do our wishes summon conjecture) that Lady Biddy had found means to send me a message, and that the man who was charged with it, fearing to enter, had slid it beneath the door, which explained the shuffling sound I had heard before he went down.

I rushed back with the precious treasure, and, holding it as near the light from the rift as I could, read the inscription on the outside: "To my dear Cousin Benet."

And then, laughing like a fool for joy, I claps it to my mouth and kisses it.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HOW I WAS LED ON BY PASSION TO CUT A MAN'S THROAT.

As soon as I had got the better of my ecstasy, I held the letter again up to the light, yet could not make out one word of it, for the tears of gladness in my eyes. However, I brushed these away with my hand impatiently, and so held the letter up again, but still with the knife in my hand, for I was now more eager than ever to accomplish my design and overtake my lady, who, I doubted not, had writ me some comforting words to let me know how I might best come at her. And now, my eyes being clear, I read her letter, which I can repeat word for word; for, sure, I read it a hundred times, and each word did engrave itself into my memory.

"We are overtaken," the letter began, "by soldiers charged to carry us back to Castello Lagos, and surrender us into the hands of Rodrigues. To save me from such a fate, which was worse than death tenfold, Senhor de Pino has offered to convey me to Caracas. I have tried, but in vain, to obtain the same favor for you; but he dare not venture upon it. Indeed, he endangers his own life in saving me, wherefore I look to you to support the story he has given out to account for not obeying the governor's orders to the letter—to wit, that I have perished by the way. I know you are too reasonable and too generous to bear me ill-will for abandoning you, for sure you will own I have no choice but to do so. Farewell, Benet. Oh, may Providence be merciful to you!"

When I had came to the end, and turned it about, to see if there was not some little kind word that I had overlooked and could find none, the knife dropped from my hand; and truly all vigor and power seemed gone from my body, so that my limbs trembled under me as if I had just risen from a bed of sickness.

Then I could not believe I had read aright, and so went through it again and again and again; after that, pondering each word, to see if I could not make it appear a little better than it looked.

At last, when I could no longer see the writing for want of light, I flung myself prone on the ground, and gave myself up to the most miserable reflections ever man endured. It was as if a miser had suddenly discovered all his gold turned to fine ashes; for no miser ever prized his pieces for their true ring and bright lustre more than I valued Lady Biddy for her loyalty, and generous, loving disposition; and now I could find nothing but heartless ingratitude and careless cruelty in her nature, to abandon me thus, without a word of regret or comfort. It seemed to me as if her chief end in writing was to obtain security for herself and Lewis de Pino, by persuading me to support the story of her death; and with such a cold, cruel heart, to invoke the mercy of Providence towards me was nothing but hypocrisy, with a taint of blasphemy.

"Had she studied to crush the love out of my heart she could not have writ more unkindly," says I to myself. Then it came to my mind that this cruelty was studied to that end, in order that my passion might not give me the power to escape and rejoin her. And the more I thought of this, the more likely it appeared. "She has Lewis de Pino," says I, grinding my teeth in rage, "and has no further need of me."

Then I cursed her for a cruel, unkind jade, and would try to think I was well rid of such a baggage—that all women were false alike for fools and boys to love, and fit only to be treated as men like Rodrigues treated them. "They make sport," says I, "of those who are fond enough to love them, and kiss the hand of a cruel, hardened wretch like Lewis de Pino. 'Tis the trick of a dog who snaps at loving children who would caress it, and cringes before the tyrant who spurns it with his foot. Fear not that I shall seek to separate you from your lord—no, not though I saw him lift the whip to flog you as he would another slave. I trust no woman again; the friendship of Rodrigues is more stanch and loyal. I have done all a man could do in proportion to his means for the love of a woman; but I have come to an end of my folly. My body shall shed its blood no more for you—no, nor my heart a tear. And yet," thinks I, my rage abating as I perceived how dreary and barren my life must henceforth be, which seemed, as I looked back on it, to be all strewn with flowers and gladdened with sunshine—"yet, in truth, I do wish you had died before you writ that letter. Would that I could yet treasure that tender joy of love for you that has made a fool of me! Ay, would that you had died ere I knew you worthless, while I yet thought you all that was beautiful and good and kind! 'Twould have broke my heart to have lost you then; but better 'tis to live with ever-abiding sorrow for such loss than to find nothing in the world to weep for."

In this fashion did I pass from one fit to another—from rage to regret, from bitter hate to tender grief—till the stars shone brightly through the rifts above; but they came into sight and passed away, marking the growing hours, without my heeding any longer the increasing distance between Lady Biddy and me; nor did I once think to make my escape. She was gone from me forever, and with her all my hopes and anxiety. I gave no thought as to what would happen on the morrow, or what my fate would be when Rodrigues got me again into his hands. If I had thought of it I should have welcomed the prospect of death itself even by the worst torture his cruel nature could devise.

Lady Biddy had appealed to my generosity and reason, but I had neither one nor the other, else had I perhaps brought myself to see that, after all, she had done no more than I should have bid her do if her fate had been in my hands. Could I have consented to her being carried back with me to Rodrigues? No! not though the alternative was to yield her to the mercy of Lewis de Pino. Then why was I so put about because she had done that which I would have had her do? Simply because she had not paid me the compliment to ask my advice? There may have been no time to appeal to my decision; she may, as she

said, have depended on my good judgment to accept what was inevitable. These and many other arguments I could urge, never occurred to me then, for my reason was undone.

As I lay there on the ground with that passionate turmoil in my breast, with my eyes turned away from the stars that seemed to look down on me through the night with a sweet, still sorrow that made my pain the more hard to endure, I saw a streak of light between the door and the footsill, and presently heard the bar being taken down very carefully, but after a pause, as if assurance were being made that I was not astir.

"They are come to murder me in my sleep," thinks I; "is this the mercy she prayed Providence to bestow on me, or did she pray that mercy of Lewis de Pino?"

The bar being down, first one bolt grated slowly in the socket, and then the other.

"Now," thinks I, "will they come upon me cautiously, or will they do it with a sudden rush?"

But so little count did I make of my life that I did not stir nor take my arm from under my head.

The door creaked slowly on its hinges, and I saw the wall beyond through the widening opening, and a lantern set upon the ground. Then a great shock head came athwart the opening, dark against the light on the wall; and after peering in for a minute or so without seeing anything (for I lay far back in the dark), or hearing any movement, the man ventured in a little further, so that his figure blocked out the light still more; and thus he stood another minute, turning his head this way and that, as if to make sure I was not hidden against the wall, ready to spring on him. Then he draws back and picks up something which stood behind the door with his left hand, and then the lantern with his right, and, stepping sideways and very gingerly past the door, he comes into my chamber, so that I could see he carried in his left hand a pitcher, and under that arm a little bundle.

"So," thinks I, "it is to bring my food, and not to murder me, the fellow has come. 'Tis all the same to me. I would as soon have his knife as his food in me."

Setting down the pitcher and the bundle, he lifts the lantern high and looks about; but not seeing me for the shadow where I lay, and the feeble light of his candle, he puts up his hand, and, shoving his hat on one side, scratches his head, as if perplexed to know where I had got to. Then moving a couple of steps forward on his toes, he holds up the lantern again and peers around, and then, getting a glimpse of me, gives a nod of satisfaction, as much as to say, "Oh, you're there after all, are you?" and so he comes forward again towards me, but very cautiously setting down the lantern and turning the door of it towards me, that the light might not fall upon my eyes.

And now the idea seized me of a sudden that I might throw this fellow down and make my escape, whilst a wicked longing for vengeance burnt up my heart. I know not what bloody design lay at the bottom of my purpose, but I made up my mind I would escape and overtake Lady Biddy, though she was in the furthest corner of the earth. So with the cunning of a villain I closed my eyes, that the fellow might not see by their glitter I was awake (yet not so close but that I could watch him well), in order that he might get near to me before I sprang at him.

He seemed to have some ill forecast of my design, for more than once he stopped betwixt the lantern and me to scratch his head and consider of his safety. However, he ventures within about a couple of feet of me, and then squatting down reaches out his arm, as if he would wake me to let me know he had brought food for my use. And though this was a kindly office, deserving of a better return (for I took no heed of it because of the devilish wickedness in my heart), I suddenly caught hold of his extended arm, and, giving it a sharp jerk, threw him on his side.

Seeing a knife in his belt, I bethought me I would cut his throat, and so save myself from pursuit, for there is no vile murder a man will stop short of when he gives up his soul to the fiend of vengeance; and this purpose came so suddenly to my mind (even as he was rolling over, and the handle of his knife caught a ray of light from the lantern) that I had no time to consider what I was about. In a moment I had sprung up, and set my knee in his flank, and grasping him by his ragged shock of hair with my left hand, so that I drew his head back between his shoulders, I whipped out his knife with my right.

Surely in another moment I should have cut his throat, but that just then, raising his voice as well as he could for his position, he cries out, in very good English—

"Lord love you, master, would you murder your own countryman?"

CHAPTER XL.

I FIND AN EXCELLENT FRIEND IN PLACE OF A CRUEL ENEMY.

Hearing these words, I held my hand for amazement, though the knife was within a span of his throat. In that instant it came across my mind that the letter which had so distracted me was not of Lady Biddy's writing. I had not hitherto questioned this matter; for, firstly, I knew not her hand; and, secondly, neither Lewis de Pino nor any one else we had met since our coming on these shores had comprehended one word of our language. The letter was badly writ in a large and painful hand, but that might have been owing to ill accommodation for writing; and, indeed, I had not regarded the manner of it, but only the matter. But now, hearing this fellow speak in English, it did, as I say, cross my mind that he had penned it.

This took no longer to present itself to my intelligence than a flash of a musket.

"Fellow," says I hoarsely, "was it you that wrote that letter to me."

"Ay," says he, "with a plague to it; for if I had not writ it I should not have got into this mess."

Whereupon I flung aside the knife, and, laying hold of his two hands, could have kissed him for my great delight, despite the suffering I had endured through his handiwork.

Then I covered my face with my hands for shame to think how I had wronged that pure sweet girl by leaping so quickly to an evil opinion of her; and to think she might have so fallen away from a noble condition, I burst out with tears, and sobbed like any child; and from that to think that she had not fallen away, and was still the same dear woman I had thought her, I fell to laughing; and, springing to my feet, cut a caper in the air like a very fool, and might have proceeded to further extravagances in my delirium but that my good angel (as I dubbed the fellow), laying his hands on me whispered:

"For Heaven's sake, master, contain yourself a bit, or I shan't come out of this business with a whole skin yet. I doubt but you have waked some of the cursed Portugals by your antics."

With this he creeps over to the door, and thrusting his head over the stairs stands there listening carefully a minute or two; after which, seeming satisfied that no one was astir, he closes the door gently, and creeps back to me, by which time I had come to a more sober condition, though still near choking with the bounding of my heart and the throbbing of the blood in my veins for excess of joy.

"'Tis all quiet below," says he in a whisper; "but betwixt getting my throat cut by you, and being fleaed alive by the Portugals for being here, I've had a narrow squeak. Howsomer, I suppose you bear me no ill-will?"

"Heaven forgive me for treating you as an enemy!" says I, grasping his hand again.

"As for that," says he, "I don't blame you for your intent to stick me if you thought I was one of those accursed Portugals; and how were you to know better, finding me crawling on you in their own manner. Let us drink a dram, master, to our better acquaintance; 'twill stiffen our legs and clear our heads, and mine are all of a jelly-shake with this late bout."

"Where is my cousin?" I asked him, as he was drinking from the jar.

"That's good," says he, taking the jar from his mouth and handing it to me. "Take a pull at it—asking your pardon for drinking first, but I've lost my good manners with twelve years of slavery."

"My cousin," says I—"the lady in whose name you wrote that letter?"

"Drink," says he. "We've got no time to lose if, as I do hope, you're minded to get away from this."

"Ay," says I; "but my cousin?"

"Drink," says he.

Seeing he was of a persistent sort, I lifted the jar to my lips to cut the matter short.

"The female," says he, "went on with De Pino and his train about ten minutes after you were brought up here. De Pino made her believe you had gone on ahead, being in a strange dull humor, and she, to overtake you, hurried away. Drink," he adds, seeing me still with the jar a little from my lips. So I drank; but betwixt two gulps I said:

"They are still gone on the road to Caracas?"

"Caracas!" says he. "Lord love you, master!" (an exclamation with which he larded his sentences continually), "when they get to their journey's end they won't be within a hundred leagues of Caracas."

"Whither is he carrying her, then, in Heaven's name?"

"To Quito, where De Pino spends his time when he is not trafficking. Lord love you, master, don't spare the liquor."

I drank deeply to satisfy him, and that we might come more quickly to the matter I had a greater thirst for.

"Now," says I, "tell me how you came to write that letter."

He took the jar out of my hand and drank again in silence. At length he put it from his lips with a gasp.

"Have another turn; we may not have a taste of wine for many a long day hence," says he.

"I can drink no more. Would to Heaven I could get you to answer my questions!"

"Time enough for that," says he, "when we get where we can talk above a pig's whisper with no fear of being heard. Now, master, if you can drink no more, we'll set about getting out of this. We shall be all right if we tread light, and don't bungle till we get to the foot of the stairs. There I must put out the lantern. But you lay hold of my shoulder and get ready for a bolt if needs be. Are you got a knife?"

"No," says I.

"Then I must manage to get you one when we are below. A couple of swords won't be an inconvenience to us, neither. You won't have another dram?"

"No," says I; "and you have had enough."

"That's as may be," says he. "I could drink a tun of it. Howsomever, I'll take it you're right, so far as our safety is concerned. Now, master, you take my knife and follow close. Keep your questions till we get a league on our way. I'll carry the lantern and this bag of victuals, and if I'd got another hand, hang me if I'd leave the jar behind. Here goes, master. Remember, if we are caught we shall be fleaed alive. Now, then—softly does it! Not a word!"

CHAPTER XLI.

A DISCOURSE WITH MY NEW-FOUND FRIEND MATTHEW PENNYFARDEN.

When we got to the foot of the stairs my comrade put out the light, and I, laying my hand on his shoulder, as he bade me, followed softly at his heels in the dark for some paces, when we came to a door that stood ajar. Here he paused and peered out carefully; then, pushing the door open, he passed out into the open.

He gave me the bag of food to hold, lifted up his finger as a sign to me to wait there, and then entered the tower again by another door in that part where the guard lay; and so I stood, with the drawn knife in my hand and my eyes on the lookout for a foe, till he returned with a sword in each hand and a knife stuck in his belt. He seemed to have been gone an age, but I believe he was no more than ten minutes at the outside; but I was consumed with impatience.

He put one of the swords in my hand, and signed to me to follow. Then we threaded our way betwixt the tower and the huts, and coming to the end of a little alley he again peers out into the space beyond, first to the right and then to the left, very carefully, and seeing no one (for the Portugals here lay within doors because there was no turf, as in the other stations, but only hard, rocky ground), he nudged me with his elbow and struck out pretty briskly to the gate he had previously set ajar, which we passed, and so got out without discovery, to our great comfort.

Our road lay up the hills on the other side of the valley, and a rough and troublesome way it was by reason of the loose stones and deep holes which in certain parts, where the rocks shut out the light of the stars on either hand, were like so many pitfalls. Yet I was too light of heart to heed the bruising of my shins a farthing, though my comrade did curse prodigiously, spite of his saying he would not speak for a league, as I have told.

When we had gone about an hour, my comrade, as I call him, after coming nigh to break his neck over a rock, sits him down on a rock, saying we might now well afford to fetch our breath and rub our shins for a space. So now, sitting down beside him, I begged he would loose his tongue to satisfy my earnest anxiety.

"Well," says he with a sigh, "I am not used to this business, and 'tis a long story. Howsomever, as you desire it, here goes. My name is Matthew Pennyfarden, and I was born in the village of Newlyn, near Penzance, in Cornwall, in the year of our Lord one thousand five hundred and ninety-four."

"Nay," says I, "you may skip thirty-three years of your adventures, and come to what took place when, you first saw my cousin, Lady Biddy Fane."

"Lord love you, master," says he, "that simplifies the job vastly" (he was a sly rogue of some humor). "Well, then, you must know that when I came to the station yesterday afternoon with four other slaves, burdened with gold muck from that part of the valley where the mines lie, our factor tells me that the merchant Senhor de Pino would speak with me; whereupon I goes to the factor's office with him, and there De Pino asks me if I could write English and would earn a jar of wine; to which I made reply that I could do the one as readily as I would the other, seeing I was two years an attorney's clerk before I was so foolish as to quit my employ and run away to sea, and was now as dry as any limekiln. On this he sets me down before a table, with an inkhorn and a sheet of paper for my work, and tells me in his own tongue what he would have writ in mine. When I had done this, he goes over the writing with me a dozen times, questioning as to this word and doubting as to that, scratching out here and writing in there, till we could find no further room for improvement, when he gives me a fresh sheet of paper and has it all writ out again for fair. So, having come to an end of the business, he orders the factor to give me a jar of wine, as he had promised, and send me back to the mine. Now a man can not serve the devil without learning the smell of brimstone, and I had been long enough with my attorney to get a pretty keen scent for mischief; wherefore, as I went back to my accursed mine, turning this affair over in my mind, I came to a pretty fair understanding of what lay at the bottom of this letter-writing. Yet, to make sure, I turns out of my way (being alone, for the rest had gone back with their empty baskets while I was writing the letter)—I goes about, I say, to sneak up among the rocks to where I could get a fair view of the station without being seen. There I had just posted myself when I see the Portugals bearing a man tied up neck and crop to the guardhouse, and says I to myself, 'That's Cousin Pengilly, or I'm a Dutchman.' When you were clapped up and the Portugals had come back from the guardhouse, the mules were brought out and packed, and one part of the train was sent on, while the other waited in readiness to start, which perplexed me somewhat till ten minutes later, when a female was led out by De Pino and seated on a mule, and that part of the cavalcade set out pretty briskly, as if to overtake the other. Then I hit upon it that De Pino had practiced this stratagem to make your cousin believe you had gone on first, and hasten her departure from the station. But I pray you, master," says he, breaking off and opening the bag of victuals, "do pick a bit, for I warrant you have had nothing betwixt your lips since you was clapped up—have you, now?"

"You are right," says I, falling to with a relish; "but go on."

"Ay," says he, "I guessed as much. They served me that same way when I first came into captivity, starving me till I was too weak to make resistance, and glad enough to accept the work of a slave that I might fill my belly. And surely that was the fate they intended for you. And this did put me in mind not to touch a drop of the wine, lest a taste might tempt me to drink all, but to leave it hid up in that rock and go back to my work dry, and also to set aside my supper when it was served out to us at sunset."

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed, "no wonder you drank so heartily when we were in the tower."

"Ay," says he, "I overcame the flesh as long as I could, but I could hold out no longer."

"And you have fasted full as long as I have, by the same token," says I.

"You've hit it again," says he; "but that did not call for such courage as t'other, for I would rather fast a whole day than go dry an hour."

This fellow's generosity touched my heart, and I would not eat another morsel, nor let him speak, till he had eaten his fair share of the food. And now I saw why he had been so loth to begin a long history with the bag of victuals untouched.

When we had come to the end of our meal, my comrade proposed we should move on; "for," says he, "I care not how I knock my ribs against the rock now that I have something within me to resist the shock."

When we had got on our way again, and were come to a fairly level part of the road where we could converse without inconvenience, I asked my comrade if there was any truth in that letter concerning soldiery being sent by Dom Sebastian to recover us.

"Lord love you!" says he, "not a word; 'twas all a plan of De Pino's invention. But tell me, master, how you came to fall into the hands of such a villain."

When I told him briefly my history, he considers awhile, and then says he:

"You have naught to fear from Sebastian; for though he is as treacherous as any other Portugal, and not one of them is a true man, yet have these rogues a certain kind of fair dealing amongst themselves, and having sold you to De Pino he would not go back on his bargain, though Rodrigues should offer twice as much to get you back as Dom Sebastian received for parting with you."

"Then," says I, "you believe Dom Sebastian sold us to De Pino?"

"I am as certain of that as I am that De Pino sold you to our factor."

"And how are you certain of that, my friend?" says I.

"Because he did not stick his dagger into you when you were asleep. But for his avarice, you would not be alive now, you may be sure. A pretty taking our factor will be in when we find you flown; 'tis as good as twenty pieces of eight out of his pocket. We must look to it, master, that he doesn't catch us, for certain it is he will hunt us."

"What would he do if he caught us?"

"You might get off with a flogging and a pretty long spell of starvation; but he'd flea me, as he has before; and once is enough for a lifetime, as you would agree if you knew what it was like."

"You have spoken before of this fleaing," says I; "what do you mean?"

"If there was light I would show you my back for a sign. I've had a piece of skin stripped off my body an ell long and an inch wide."

"Good God!" says I, "is such barbarity possible?"

"Ay," says he, "and worse. I'll be fleaed rather than have the soles of my feet roasted if he gives me my choice."

Only to hear of this wickedness made me sick, and I could say nothing for some minutes.

"Tell me, Matthew," says I, when I had got over my qualm, "why you risked such a fearful punishment to liberate a man you had never seen?"

"Because you was an Englishman," says he stoutly. "Lord love you, master, I knew I should find you a true man and a kind friend."

"But," says I, "couldn't you as well have made your escape without me as with me?"

"No," says he, "for I'd as leave hang myself on a tree ere I started as be brought to that end by the misery of wandering alone in the woods. Look you, master, afore you go any further," stopping me, "there's time to get back to the station, and return to the guardhouse, while the Portugals are still in a log-sleep, and I would have you understand what escape means. It means hardships, and suffering, and solitude. We daren't go near a town, for fear of the Portugals; and we daren't go near the Indian villages, for every white man is hated by them, with a very good reason. There's fleaing on one hand, and death on the other; and we've got to live betwixt 'em as best we may. Take time for reflection and choose without concern for me."

"Nay," says I, "it needs no reflection to choose between freedom and slavery"; and taking him by the hand, I drew him onwards.

"You are an Englishman, master, and I love you," says he, "and I shall love you still more when your hair grows a bit, and you look less like a Portugal; for I do loathe the very resemblance of those accursed men."

"Surely," says I, "there must be some good men amongst them?"

"Not to my knowledge," says he. "There was one that I thought a decent sort of a fellow; and he grumbling every day to me of his estate, which was little better than a slave's, I opened to him a design for escaping together. He betrayed me; for he was naught but a spy set to that purpose by our factor, who would test me. And so I got fleaed for trusting a Portugal; but I trust none henceforth. As for that," adds he, "we shall have no need to trust 'em, for we two shall be company enough for each other, I warrant."

"We two?" says I; "nay, we shall be three."

"As how?" says he.

"Why," says I, "are we not on our road to rescue my cousin from the hands of Lewis de Pino?"

"No," says he, stopping again; "that are we not. For we're giving De Pino as wide a berth as I can contrive. Our factor will set out on that path as soon as he finds you flown."

"Friend," says I, "'tis for you to choose betwixt going on with me to the rescue of my cousin or taking me back to the station."

He tilted his hat forwards, and, scratching his head, was silent a minute; then, in a grumbling kind of voice, he says:

"What a plague do we want with a female?"

"Would you suffer her to go into slavery?" says I.

"They like it," says he sullenly. "Not at first, but after a bit. She'll be treated well, and I count she won't thank you from taking her away from a fine house and rich gowns to wander about in the woods without a roof to her head or a whole rag to her back."

"Nor matter for that," says I; "she shall be taken out of the Portugal's hands if I live."

"Well," says he, a little more cheerfully, "if it is to rob the Portugal, I shall be less loth; and to oblige you, more willing. We must turn back, howsomever, to those horrid rocks again."

We turned about, and retraced our steps in silence for a while.

"Don't take it amiss, master," says he presently, "if I'm a little bit downhearted at the prospect of having a lady's society; but I've had so much of that sort of thing these last ten years that I shouldn't be sorry if I never saw another female."

"How's that?" says I.

"Why, master," says he, "I'm married."

"And you can quit your wife without regret?" says I.

"It ain't a wife I'm quitting without regret," says he; "it's twenty or thirty."

I asked him to explain this matter; which he did forthwith, telling me that all the slaves in those mines were women, and that when one wounded herself, or fell sick by overwork, so that to save her life it was necessary she should lay up for a time, she was forthwith married to him. This strange custom perplexed me until I came to perceive the motive.

"Have you any children?" says I.

"Children!" says he; "Lord love you, I've got sixty if I've got one. But you can't expect a father to be very partial to his children when there so many of 'em. I give you my word, I don't know Jack from Jill; and they're all orange-tawney."

CHAPTER XLII.

WE ARE PURSUED BY DOGS AND PORTUGALS.

In this discourse we retraced our steps, and crossing the valley (yet wide of the station) we ascended again that chain of hills crossed the day before; for Lewis de Pino, as I was now informed by Matthew, had turned out of his road to sell me and traffic for gold; and after a long and painful march we came about daylight to the woods.

Here we rested, though against my inclination, being tormented with apprehensions concerning my dear Lady Biddy; but Matthew was pretty nigh spent with fatigue, having less strength than I, and none of that terrible anxiety which pricked me onward. Thus, in one way and another, was a good deal of precious time lost.

When Matthew perceived that my impatience was becoming intolerable to me, he rose, and we once more pushed on. Yet he had a difficulty to keep pace with me, and from time to time he would remonstrate at my pace, saying, "Not so fast, master—not so fast; you forget that your legs are a quarter of a yard longer than mine," and the like.

The road still skirted the mountains pretty high up, yet still amidst the woods, whence now and then we caught a glimpse of the river shining below, very sweet and peaceful in the gray light of the morning.

"Now, master," says Matthew, when we had gone about a couple of leagues along this road—"now we shall do well to quit this road, and make our way as best we may through the woods; for I reckon we are getting nigh a station, and at any turn are likely to be spied."

Accordingly we struck into the wood, and none too soon, for ere we had made a hundred yards we were brought to a stand by the furious barking of a dog.

"If we can't silence that brute we are undone," whispered Matthew, "for they are trained to hunt down runaways, and will not quit their quarry till the huntsmen are come up with it."

Presently the barking ceased for a minute, and we heard the voices of men egging the dog on; yet could we see neither one nor the other for the thick growth, though their cries sounded no further off than a couple of hundred yards or so.

"Master," says Matthew, very much crestfallen, "promise me one thing."

"Ay," says I, "and you may depend on it I will keep my word."

He pressed my hand and nodded; then says he:

"Promise me that if I am taken, and you see a chance to pass your sword through me, you will put an end to my life."

"Nay," says I, shrinking before such a cruel possibility, "things will not come to that pass."

"Promise me, all the same," says he, very earnestly.

"You have my promise, friend," says I, though I would not have given it had I foreseen what he was about to ask.

"Good," says he. "I could lose another ell of my skin without much more than a day's howling; and I believe I could stand having my feet roasted, after the first scorching had taken my senses away; but I couldn't endure to be taken back a slave and lose my freedom."

I felt for the poor fellow with all my heart, sympathizing with his love of liberty, till he added, in a still more melancholy tone:

"I am not a family man."

Then I felt as if I must laugh, despite our peril, for it appeared that he dreaded being restored to his wives and children more than all the tortures the Portugals could inflict, and preferred death. Yet I am now inclined to think this reason was but an afterthought of his, and that he merely put it forward to hide his grave dread by way of pleasantry; for I have remarked that men of humor will in their most painful moments put forward a jest, when at another time they would be silent. So I have seen some jest over their disease when they know it to be mortal, and others even who have died with a pleasantry at their own expense on their lips.

All this time we stood in the midst of great feather-plants^[2] as high as my shoulder, hoping the dog would come nigh enough for us to cut him down ere we were spied by the men, who, we doubted not, had muskets to defend them; also we dared not move, lest we should be heard by the dog or be seen by the men. Presently the barking and the sound of voices went further away, as if the dogs had got on our track and were hunting it back the way we had come; then the barking ceased altogether, to our great content, for we made sure thereby the scent was lost, and the chase given up.

"Now," says Matthew, "let us put our right leg foremost and get down to the river as best we may, for if we get t'other side of that unseen we may laugh at dogs and Portugals."

"Nay," says I, "go if you will, but I can not get away from this station until I know whether my dear cousin be there or not. You live for freedom," adds I, "but I live for something more than that."

"No need to tell me that," says he. "Lord love you, master, do you think I don't know what's the matter with you? Trust me, I'll play you no scurvy trick, though I don't relish the society of females. Do as I wish you, and believe me I am thinking as much of your welfare and happiness as my own. But, for Heaven's sake, do not let us waste time a-talking here like so many attorneys. You shall have all the explanation you need when we get t'other side of the water."

I felt sure of this good fellow's honesty, and believing his judgment better than mine, knowing more of these parts and the ways of Portugals than ever I did, I yielded to his persuasions, and we scuttled down the hillside as quickly as we might for the obstructions that pestered us more and more as we advanced. For in the lower sides of these hills, towards the bottom, where the sun burns fiercer, the soil is moister, and a greater depth of earth lies over the rock, the growth is prodigiously thick; and besides the mass of shrubs upon the ground that one must pick one's way through not to be torn in pieces, the trees are all netted together with lianas as stout as a ship's tackle; brambles, briars, and hanging vines of a hundred sorts; so there is no way betwixt them but what a man may cut for himself with his sword.

"Give me a valley like that we have left behind, where there is naught but stones and rocks," says Matthew; "for though you may break your shins one moment and your nose the next, yet can you make some headway. But here," says he, "no man can roll down a hundred yards without setting foot to the ground. Howsomever, we're shut of the dog for our consolation."

Scarce were these words out of his mouth when they were forcibly contradicted by a fierce barking close in our rear; and turning about we spied the brute (as big as a wolf and as horrid) bounding towards us. But seeing us prepared with our swords to cut him in pieces, he stops short. Nor would he anyhow permit us to get near him (though Matthew, to tempt him, hid his sword behind him, and made forward with his hand out, saying "Poor doggy" very civilly, as though he would caress him), but backing when we advanced towards him, approaching as we went on, the dog contrived ever to keep well out of our reach, all the while barking to be heard a mile off.

"This will never do," says I; "the Portugals will be down on us directly."

"Ay," says he; "do you cut a way through the briars, while I keep this brute off."

So I hacked away with all my might at the lianas, while Matthew occupied himself with the dog, sometimes in Portuguese, commanding him (as I judged) to go home in a tone of authority, or entreating him mildly to come near and get a chop for his pains; but all to no purpose, except that he kept him from doing us a mischief with his fangs.

"Go home, you beast!" cries he: and then in the same breath, "Would we were back in my old valley, master: I'd brain you with a rock in a twinkling. But here is nothing to hurl at the cursed beast. Nice old doggy, come here!"

But now he had to hold his peace, for we could hear in the woods above us the voices of Portugals crying to one another, and shouting encouragement to the dog; nor dare I chop our way further, lest the flashing of the sword should be seen above the growth about us, and bring a shower of musket-balls upon us.

The only thing that saved us from immediate discovery and apprehension was that our pursuers found the same difficulty in advancing that we had overcome, and had to cut their way to where they heard the barking of the dog.

"If we could only silence that vile dog!" whispered Matthew, grinding his teeth.

"Ay," says I, "but how may we do that?"

"I see but one way," says he, "and that not very promising, but 'tis better than to wait here and be shot. Let us go back the way we have come."

"Why," says I, "that is but to offer ourselves the sooner to the Portugals."

"Nay," says he, "they are still a pretty fair distance off. Come and do as I ask you."

"Lead on, friend," says I. "You are better acquainted with this warfare than I."

So Matthew started at once to go back up the hill by the way we had cut through the growth, which did seem to me the rankest folly in the world. And what made it look worse was that, instead of trying to pacify the dog, he enraged it more than ever by thrusting at it with his sword, spitting at it, etc., but in betwixt he gave me instructions, and opened out his designs.

"You see the big tree on your right hand in front?" says he.

"Ay," says I.

"Get behind me, and when I pass that tree slip behind it and wait ready with your sword. The dog knows me, and takes no note of you."

There was no time to say more, for he had come abreast of the tree, and here he did draw the dog into a greater rage than ever, so that (as he had directed) I slipped behind the tree unobserved. And now, seeing Matthew's excellent design, I waited with my sword raised above my head.

After he had gone forward another two or three paces, Matthew begins to draw back, all the while gibing and jeering at the dog, who was now so furious that he even ventured to snap at the sword-blade when Matthew thrust it forward; and so step-by-step Matthew falls back until, passing me a couple of paces, the dog comes snapping and snarling forward after him till he is fairly within my reach, when with one swift blow I did cut him right through the loins clean in two halves.

CHAPTER XLIII.

WE LAY OUR HEADS TOGETHER CONCERNING WHAT IS BEST TO BE DONE.

Now having slain the dog, as I have shown, we crouched us down, that we might not be seen, feeling pretty secure; for those who pursued were a good way to the north of the path we had cut for ourselves, and unless by accident they hit upon that, they might hack and hew for a whole week (now there was no dog to betray our whereabouts) without coming nigh us. Indeed, as the old saying goes, 'twas like searching of a needle in a bottle of hay, with this addition—that they who searched were no bigger than the needles they sought. As we squatted there we could plainly see them chopping at the growth to make a passage (which was a comforting assurance they had not hit upon the alley we had made), together with much cursing and swearing; very grateful also to our ears, as showing they liked not their business, and crying out to the dog, who, for aught they knew, had started some game or was busy battering upon his prey.

For some time this uproar continued, and at one moment it seemed to be coming perilously near; but in the end they overshot us, going down the hill some way below. Then they gave over shouting, and we heard no more of them, by which we judged they had given up the attempt to find us or the dog in despair, and were gone back the way they had come.

So when we counted it safe to move, we once more began to force our passage down to the river; and, not to tire the reader as much as we tired ourselves in this business, we at length reached the water-side.

Here, being exhausted with our exertions and faint for want of food, we made a fire, and ate a serpent roasted on the embers, which Matthew had cut down; and this I recollect, because it was the first time I had tasted of these reptiles; nor should I then have eaten it, having a great loathing for such worms, but that Matthew assured me they were excellent meat, as indeed they are for those who can get no better.

While we were regaling ourselves I begged Matthew to tell me why he had come down to the river instead of returning to the road.

"For two reasons, master," he replies. "First of all, there was not a bend of that road that was safe for us, seeing that at any turn we might have marched smack into the hands of the Portugals."

"I don't see that," says I; "for we had stood a better chance of catching sight of Lewis de Pino and his train going on before us than they of spying us creeping on behind them."

"How about the others?" says he.

"What others?"

"Why, they who have been hunting us with the dog."

"They, I take it, are Lewis de Pino's men," says I.

"Lord love you, master, not they!" says he. "Do you think that dog was his, too? Oh, no! He and I are old enemies. He belongs to my old master the factor, and is kept at the station to hunt poor runaways. I knew the moment I heard his bark that my factor's men were on our heels. Villain! he is shrewd enough to know you would follow in your cousin's steps, and dispatched his men—if he be not himself at their head—to search the road and apprise De Pino of your escape. Now, master, if they had slipped by without being betrayed by the dog they would have spurred on till they overtook De Pino, and finding us not with him would have laid in ambush to take us as we followed after. Do you think I'm far out in my calculation?"

"No," says I; "you're right, I must allow, Matthew; and now for your second reason."

"The second hangs on to the first, master; for it stands to reason that if we ran a fair chance of losing our own liberty by sticking to the road, we were in a poor way to save the female. I went a bit too far maybe in supposing that you had no certain scheme of your own for circumventing De Pino."

"No," says I; "you were in the right again there: I had no fixed purpose."

"You had a notion maybe that we might catch De Pino and his men all napping, and that we might just get away with the female before they woke."

I admitted that if I had any scheme at all it was no better than that.

"Well, master," says Matthew, "we must give the Portugals credit for having sense enough to sleep with one eye open after being warned that you were at large, and so you must see that it would be courting our own destruction to attempt any such design as that."

"Ay," says I, "but I sha'n't be content to escape destruction myself if my cousin is to be abandoned to a worse fate."

"True, master," says he; "but as her escape depends on our existence, we must insure the latter for to compass the former."

"There I agree with you," says I; "but do you, if you can, show me by what means you reckon to get at my Lady Biddy, for up to this you have only led me further away from her."

"Master," says he, "so far as my observation goes, the best part of mortal success has been achieved by the turning of happy accidents to advantage, and our success in this undertaking must likewise depend upon favorable circumstances coming to our hand. Nevertheless, we can do something, and the best chance of gaining a victory is to attack the enemy on the side where assault is least looked for; and so," says he, seeing I was pretty well driven to the end of my patience with his philosophy, "instead of hanging about in De Pino's rear, where he undoubtedly expects to spy us, we must get in front of him, where he as little looks to meet us as the man in the moon."

"And how on earth do you expect to get in front of him by coming down here?"

"By the river," says he, "where there are neither rocks to throw us over, nor briars to balk our progress."

"He will be leagues ahead of us, man, before nightfall," says I, in desperation.

"No matter for that; we'll be leagues ahead of him before daybreak. I warrant we'll be at Valetta a day before he arrives."

"Where is Valetta?"

"Valetta is a town on this river that he must pass through. 'Tis four days' march from here by road—a shorter journey than by the river; but we must advance while he is resting, journeying by night as well as by day. Turn and turn about, we need never stop at our oars save to eat our meals together."

"But we have no boat," says I.

"We must make one," says he.

I laughed, yet not merrily, and asked him if he expected we could make a boat in four days, when it had cost me four months and more to make a raft.

"Lord love you, master," says he, "we'll be afloat in four hours."

CHAPTER XLIV.

IN WHICH MATTHEW PLAYS THE BEGGAR AND I THE FOOL.

My comrade had no sooner made promise that we should be afloat in four hours than he started about carrying out his design.

There was in that swamp that bordered the river an amazing quantity of great cane-reeds, some twenty feet in height and more, and of these he began to cut down with his sword such as were most proper to his purpose, bidding me do the like, and choose those of last year's growth, which were dry, light, and of good girth. Nothing loath, I waded into the morass (with a care that I trod on no water-serpent) until I was pretty well up to my middle in water, and there I laid about me with a will, until I had cut as many as I could carry, which I then took to a point where the water was deep and free from this growth, and laid them beside Matthew's store. In this way we proceeded until we had laid up a good stock of these canes.

"Now," says Matthew, eyeing them, "I judge we have enough; so do you go, master, and cut me one of those plaguey vines that gave us so much trouble this morning, while I set these reeds shipshape."

Perceiving his object, I went up into the wood and cut ten or a dozen fathoms of the lianes, which, as I say, are like any ship's tackle for toughness and soundness. While I was about this, Matthew sets the canes out, with the thick end of one overlapping about three parts of its length the thick end of another in such a manner that (all being served and tightly bound with the liana at both ends, and again in two or three places towards the middle) they made a huge bundle about a yard through at its largest girth, and four yards long, tapering off at each end like a fishing-float. This being done, and the lianes bound securely to Matthew's mind, he begs me to lend him a hand at cutting away certain of the canes in the middle with my knife, which was tough work indeed (for the canes were prodigious hard), and labor we might have spared ourselves had we bethought us to dispose the canes differently before we bound them up; but this did not occur to us till we were pretty nigh the end of our job.

However, having cut out of the middle a space about four feet long by two broad, and as much in depth, our business was done.

This was the boat which was to carry us up the river, and Matthew was not a little proud of it; though I was still in a taking for fear it should turn over when we set foot into it, and capsize us both into the water; but this it did not, but carried us as steadily as we could wish, and capital good we found it for such a boat as it was.

For our sweeps or paddles we bound two stout canes together, stretching them asunder at one end and covering that part with a broad tough grass.

In this craft we made our way up that river three days and four nights, only stopping to take such rest as was needful and to procure refreshment. Many difficulties and perils we encountered by the way, but of these I have no space to tell had I the inclination, for it seems as I write that I have the same burning impatience which urged me on then to come to my Lady Biddy. Every obstacle that delayed progress enraged me. I could scarcely bring myself to let my comrade get his fair and necessary amount of sleep, but would be twitching him to awake ere he had got soundly asleep; for as to one sleeping in the boat while the other rowed, that we found impossible, because there was no room to lie down there, and necessary it was, for fear of cramps, at times to take our feet out of the water, which we had no means to keep from coming in betwixt the reeds.

But Matthew bore with me, seeing my great anxiety of mind, and that I did not rest a quarter as much as he; and though he grumbled again (but chiefly in pretense), he roused himself after the second or third twitch, and did all man could to give me hope. Indeed, a fellow of gentler temper, a more cheerful, kind friend, I never knew of his sex.

Soon after daybreak on the fourth day, having been at our sweeps a couple of hours maybe, we spied some fishing-canoes moored by the shore, and some little cot-houses hard by, by which we judged we had come to the outskirts of Valetta. Whereupon we drew into the bank, and going up through the woods to the top of a little hill, came upon tilled fields, beyond which lay the town, very gray and quiet in the creeping light of that early morning.

"Now, master," says Matthew, "the first thing is to learn if De Pino and his train have yet arrived in the town; and we can't do that standing here looking at it."

"Nay," says I, "I'm ready to go into the town at once if you are. But we must be secret."

"Ay," says he; "and for that reason you will have to bide here."

"I can not do that," says I. "Think, Matthew—she may stand in need of my help. I shall be mad if I stay here idle."

"Not so mad," says he, "as if you venture into that town. Look at your state. Could any man clap eyes on you without pointing you out to his neighbor?"

Truly I was in a sad pickle—my fine clothes that I had of Dom Sebastian rent in a hundred places with the thorns through which we had torn our way in escaping by the woods; no hat to my head; my silk stockings stained with the blood from my

scratched legs and the mud of the morass; and my hands and face swollen with the bite of those flies that haunt the river.

"You look," continues he, "as if you had broke loose from a prison, and like nothing else; and if you be taken to task by the mayor, or other busybody, to account for your condition, your answer or your silence will at once betray you for a foreigner. So will you be clapped up in jail, and the female be worse off than ever."

I was forced to admit that he was in the right, and to ask what he designed.

"Why," says he, "I shall go into the town as a shipwrecked mariner, cast ashore off Buenaventure, fallen sick of a leprosy, and begging my way to my friends at Cartagena, and no one shall count this a lie by the bravery of my dress."

Indeed he looked beggarly enough, having not a rag of shirt to his back, nor any clothes but his shoes, breeches, and a jacket of skins, with an old hat that no one would have picked off a dust-heap.

"In this guise," continues he, "may I go all through that town, asking alms in good Portuguese, so that men will be more glad to get out of my way than to stop me. And if, when I have been to all the inns and places of rest, I find De Pino is not yet come, I will sit me down against a church-door, the town gate, or elsewhere most convenient for spying who enters by the road from Darien, and wait there till nightfall, when I will come again to you. And, lest I get no broken victuals, do you have a good supper ready by way of alms to give a hungry beggar."

I promised him he should not lack for food.

"Now, master," says he, "give me something as a token that I may slip into the female's hand, when I go to beg of her, as she passes, whereby she may know that you are at hand."

I was greatly pleased with his forethought, which showed a kind consideration for Lady Biddy's happiness, and delighted to think I might thus communicate with her. So, undoing my waistcoat, I cut a fair piece from the breast of my shirt, which was of fine linen, and having pierced my finger with a thorn I contrived to trace "B. P." on this rag with my blood.

Meanwhile Matthew had gone about to find some purple berries which he crushed in divers places upon the flesh of his legs and face, so that when he came forth I scarcely knew him again, as he looked for all the world, by reason of this disfigurement, like one who was sore of a plague.

"I wager," says he, "no one will want to lay hands on me now; and as for De Pino, he will turn away in disgust at the first glance, for these Portugals pretend to have mighty nice stomachs. Howsomever, I must give myself another touch or two to deceive his eye."

Therewith he takes his knife and saws away at his bushy beard until he had brought it down to a point, after the Portugals' mode. Then he begged me to crop the hair of his head, which I did forthwith; and to see me a-trimming his head with my sword was a sight to set any barber's teeth on edge. This done, he give me his sword to take charge of, and hides his knife inside his jacket, with my token for Lady Biddy. Then folding his arms on his chest, drawing up his shoulders to his ears, and putting on a most woe-begone look, he asks me if I think he will pass muster.

"Ay," says I, "you are horrid enough, in all conscience; but with those loathsome-seeming sores upon you I doubt if my cousin will care to take my token from your hand."

"Lord love you, master," says he with a laugh, "if you knew as much of females as I do you would have no doubt on that head. There's no disguise will deceive their eyes when they have a man in their thoughts; and," adds he in a graver tone, "there's no form of distress will make them shrink from a tender office."

He gave me his hand, bidding me farewell, and went his way with a shuffling gait and a sly leer back at me to show me he understood his business.

I watched him until he entered the fields, where the tall plants presently hid him from my sight. Then I bethought me to set adrift our boat, which might have excited curiosity and suspicion had it been seen by any one passing on the river; and this I did, after cutting the lianes that bound it, so that it might go to pieces as it went down with the current. After that, with a sling I managed to kill half a dozen birds, about the size of pigeons, and these I cooked in the midst of the wood, where the smoke from my fire might not be seen. Also I gathered some good fruit, and of this food I set by enough to serve for a meal when Matthew returned. Then I sat me down at that point whence my comrade had departed, watching for his return through the fields.

Hour after hour I sat there, turning my eyes neither to the right nor to the left, for my eagerness to see him again, and my thoughts all the while running on my dear lady; but no reflections worthy to be recorded. The sun sank and the twilight faded away; but the stars were bright in the sky before I heard any sign of Matthew; then I caught a snuffling, whining voice, which I knew to be his, crying:

"Is there 'ere a kind friend will give a bit to a poor sick seafaring man?" at the same time I perceived a figure coming towards me.

"What news, Matthew—what news?" I cried, running to meet him.

"Plenty," says he; "I've done a rare day's business."

"Lord be praised!" says I; "what have you learnt?"

"That a canting rogue may earn more in a day than an honest man in a week."

"What else, what else?" says I impatiently.

"That for winning true respect there's naught like sham sores."

"For the love of Heaven do not torment me! What of my cousin?"

"Oh, she has not yet come into the town," says he; "nor will she to-night for certain; the gates were being shut when I crawled out. I told you, master, we should get here a day before De Pino."

On this I heaved a great sigh for disappointment.

"Lord love you, master," says he, "don't heave a sigh like that afore you're married, or you'll have none left for a better occasion."

This pleasantry made me sadder than before, for it put me in mind that, come what might, Lady Biddy could never be mine, nor I anything to her but as a poor faithful servant.

"Cheer up, master," says Matthew. "You may wager that if I haven't brought you one sort of comfort, I've brought you another. Feel the weight of this."

I then perceived, for the first time, that Matthew had a load on his back.

"What in the world have you got there, friend?" says I, feeling the great distended skin bag he carried.

"Wine, master—wine of the best, and a couple of gallons of it."

"How did you come by it?"

"Honestly. I paid for it with good silver, and I've enough left against times of need. For, you see, while wholesome beggars were taken into the kitchen for a paltry mess of broken victuals, I no sooner showed my face in a doorway but a silver piece was tossed into the road to get rid of me. Bless every one with a nice stomach, say I; they give me the whole street to myself when they catch sight of me, and go a roundabout way to their goal. You wonder why I wasn't turned out of the town. Lord love you, there was not a constable had the heart to lay his hand on me. A sort of a kind of a beadle came and looked at me from a distance, and I was half-afraid he meditated getting me shot with a long gun; but when I sat me down peaceably in the church-door, he saw I could do no one any mischief there, and so went away to trounce some silly folks who were trying to turn a penny or two with a dancing dog."

In this manner did he run on, telling me of his adventures during the day, until all our birds were eaten and the wine-skin half empty, when he laid himself down, chuckling over the prospect of a long night's sleep, and warning me not to arouse him too soon, as he had been forced to wait an hour at the gates.

"And," says he, "if I show myself an early riser, they may well doubt if I be a true beggar."

CHAPTER XLV.

WE GO FROM VALETTA TO SEEK MY LADY BIDDY ELSEWHERE.

The next day seemed to me as if it would never come to an end, having nothing much else to do than to watch for Matthew's return; and what made it more tedious and wearisome was that my comrade had started bidding me expect him back before midday.

"For," says he, "the next station, if I remember right, is but a matter of four or five leagues distant; so that, starting betimes, they must needs arrive about ten or eleven at the outside."

When he came not at noon I began to torment myself with fears lest some mischance had happened to Matthew; either that he had been clapped up in a bridewell to cure him of his sores, or had been recognized by Lewis de Pino, to his great misfortune. And though this was grievous enough to think on (for I loved the kind, honest rogue), yet it was nothing beside the concern I felt for Lady Biddy had such an accident arrived; for while I was lingering here, with my hands idle by my side, Lewis de Pino might be hurrying away with her to Quito.

As soon as the first star began to twinkle I could bear this suspense no longer, and started out towards the town; for if Matthew were free, I knew he would leave the town when the gates were about to be closed. About half a league from the town I met him (to my great joy), and my first question was what news he had brought with him.

Instead of beating about the bush and making a joke of my impatience, he answered, very soberly, that De Pino and his train had not yet entered the town.

"Hows'mever," says he, "there's no call to be cast down about that matter, for I may very well have made a mistake in the distance, seeing I have traveled over the road but once, and that ten or a dozen years ago. One thing is certain, master—they must arrive to-morrow, and this delay is all to our advantage, since it has given me time to pry about the town, and examine in what manner we may best contrive to get the female out of De Pino's hands."

Therewith he entered into the design he had formed for this purpose, describing the inn at which the merchants stayed, with the means of getting out of the town, and into it, without passing the gate, etc., etc., in such detail that he gave me no time to think of anything else till we had eaten our supper and emptied the wine-skin, when he declared he was too tired to converse longer; and so, laying himself down, bade me good-night and presently began to snore.

But then, my mind being no longer occupied with his return, I grew uneasy again about this delay, and could not close an eye for my trouble. I had noticed that Matthew was much less merry than usual, and now I took it into my head that the long-winded description of the inn, and his ingenious project for rescuing "the female," was nothing but a design to divert my mind, and make his own uneasiness less noticeable.

'Twas useless attempting to sleep in this disorder of mind, and I could no longer lie still when day broke; but getting up quietly, so that I might not awake Matthew, I went to a little distance and paced backwards and forwards with a heavy heart. Presently Matthew, getting up, comes to my side, and says he:

"Can't you sleep, master?"

"No," says I.

"No more can I," says he, "and I took a pretty stiff dose of wine, too, for my nightcap. I ha'n't slept a wink all night."

"You've snored pretty continually, nevertheless," says I.

"As for that," says he, "I'm a man that must be doing something; and 'tis as easy to snore as to wear spots on your face; but one is no more a sign of sleep than t'other is of a distemper."

"Why couldn't you sleep, Matthew?" says I. "What's amiss?"

"Well," says he, "De Pino and the female ought to have come in yesterday morning at the latest."

"But you said you might have made a mistake as to the distance?"

"So I might," says he slyly; "but, to make quite sure, I took the pains to inquire last night of my friend at the inn, outside the town, and I found I had not."

"Then you believe they ought to have been here before now?" says I sharply.

"Yes, master," says he gravely. "They ought to have come in the night afore last, or yesterday morning at the latest. When it came noon yesterday I gave them up; yet I stayed there in the hope I was wrong. First saying to myself that, being warned of your escape by the factor, he had thought it well to make an ambush, and wait for you to come up; and then that he had stopped for some reason of his business; but these arguments wouldn't do—and, to cut a long story short, I made up my mind

when I saw the gates closed last night, and no sign of De Pino along the road for half a mile—I made up my mind, I say, that he had taken another road."

"Taken another road!" says I, in a terrible amazement.

"Ay," says he. "I can account for it in no other way."

"And why did you not tell me this last night?" I asks angrily.

"We could do nothing in the dark, and I hoped you would get a good night's sleep and be fresh for a march this morning," says he simply. "There was no good in plaguing you before your time."

I could not be angry with the fellow after that, for he was in the right, and, 'twas out of pure kindness of heart he had held his tongue.

"I though you were so sure of the road, Matthew?" says I.

"So I was, master; and more fool I. Don't spare me; I deserve all the blame, for 'twas I who would have you come by the river when you would have gone by the road."

"Did you make no inquiry about this road last night?"

"Ay," says he. "No other road to Quito is known to the innkeeper but this. Yet he may be as great a fool as I in that matter; and though De Pino could take no other road to Quito, he might, for all that, have turned aside to some other place."

"What do you propose we should do now, Matthew?"

"Get on to the road, and hark back as soon as there is light enough for us to pick our way. We will hit the road within sight of the town-gates before they are opened, to make certain they have not come up."

The poor fellow was so crestfallen, having now no heart to disguise his discomfiture, that to cheer him I professed to be in no way disheartened by this failure.

"For," says I, "there is this advantage about it: I shall not have to rest idle here any longer. 'Twill be light enough to begin our march in half an hour."

"Why, that's true, master," says he, brightening up; "and, not to waste time, we'll have a good meal to strengthen us against fatigue."

"There's nothing to eat," says I; "we finished every scrap last night."

"Nay," says he; "I laid out for that, and brought home a peck loaf and a roast loin of mutton with me last night."

I remembered he was pretty well charged when we met overnight, but had taken no heed of what he carried, thinking in the dark it was but another skin of wine.

"Parrots are all very well for high feeding, and so are serpents and such-like," says he, fetching his loaf and the loin of mutton, "but give me bread and roast mutton when there's work to be done."

When we had finished our repast, Matthew buckled on his sword, and we started off. Striking the road after an hour's march, and making sure that no cavalcade lay between us and the town, we turned our faces to the north, and strode out with a will: nor did we check our pace for two hours, albeit the way lay all up hill and none too smooth. We met not a soul all that time, for only merchants with their trains of mules, etc., pass this way, and they not frequently, so that for a whole week there may not be a single traveler to be met. Indeed, we had scarcely dared to travel that way otherwise, for our appearance would have justified any one in taking us for outlaws—I in my tattered finery, with a peck loaf slung on my shoulder, as great knife in my girdle, a long sword in my hand, and nothing but an uncombed crop of hair on my head; and Matthew likewise fiercely armed, with a wine-skin and a bundle of broken victuals at his back, scarcely enough clothes to cover his nakedness, and a complexion as if he had just escaped from a lazaret-house—in fine, as unwelcome a knight and squire as any one might wish to meet. Nor were our movements much more reassuring than our appearance, for at every turn of the road we would stop with our swords firmly gripped, peering round the rocks and betwixt the bushes, as if we were on the lookout for some one to waylay and murder.

At length we came in sight of a station, and here with great prudence we went about to spy into it, and yet not be seen ourselves; and this, by reason of its position and the chance of encountering hunters in the surrounding wood, was a painful and tedious business; but finally getting upon the further side, and crawling near with terrible fear (lest we might arouse some watch-dog, and so have a repetition of our former trouble), we got a fair sight into the village, where was nothing to be seen but four bearded rascals playing of cards. And so, creeping out of that wood as carefully as we had crept in, we once more got into the road, and pushed onward till noon without stopping, except at the bends of the road as aforesaid.

At noon we stooped to eat and refresh ourselves, and that done, we went onward again for best part of two hours, though the sun was now at its height; but by reason we were now very high up on the side of the mountain, and that in many places the rock sheltered us with an agreeable shade, we were not so hot but that we could still march with a good heart. Yet here we stayed to consult together, for we had come to a part of the road where we could not conceal ourselves if we met Lewis de

Pino, nor retreat without exposing ourselves to the fire of his arquebuses. For the path wound along close by the side of the mountain, with no growth of herbs, and all barren for a long distance in front; nor was it possible to get out of the path by clambering upwards or sliding downwards for the prodigious steepness of it, and the road so narrow that no two pack-mules could pass each other, except by standing aside in certain cavities hewn here and there in the rock in case of one train meeting another. Down below lay the woods, but so deep that the highest tree-tops came no nearer than a couple of hundred feet of where we stood.

"Master," says Matthew, "if we meet De Pino and his merry men on this road 'twill be a bad job for us."

"Ay," says I; "and the sooner we get to the other end of it the safer we shall be."

"Lord love you, master," says he, "what a thing it is to be a philosopher! Here might I jeopardize my precious life another ten minutes but for your wisdom."

CHAPTER XLVI.

HOW WE CAME TO THAT PLACE WHICH I CALL THE VALLEY OF DEATH.

As we followed this path, we discovered that, where opportunity offered, bridges of long trees had been thrown from one jutting rock to another, to save the labor of cutting a way in the side of the mountain. We had crossed two of these bridges when Matthew, being ahead of me, suddenly mended his pace, and then, coming to a stand, turns about and cries:

"Hang me if I wasn't right after all, master. They have come along this road, but have turned back."

"How can you answer for that, friend?" says I.

"Why, look you," says he, pointing to the road a dozen yards ahead of us. "Here is a bridge broke."

Stepping briskly forward, I found that it truly was as he said, for there yawned a great gap, which no man could jump; and that there had been a bridge here we could plainly see by the print of the tree-trunks in the rubble on the ledge cut for them in the rock. Moreover, looking over the edge, we spied one of these timbers lying athwart of a rock down below.

This discovery so comforted me (for I made sure I was now near my Lady Biddy, instead of being all at sea as to her whereabouts) that I set up a great shout of joy.

"For the love of Heaven, master, have a care!" cried Matthew in a whisper, after listening a moment in terror. "Did you not hear that answer to your shout?"

"Nay," says I; "what answer?"

"I know not," says he, looking around him in a scare; "pray Heaven it be not our enemies."

"Nonsense," says I, beside myself with this return of hope; "'twas but an echo from the rocks—hark!" And with that I hallooed again as loud as I could, which was the maddest thing to do, and not to be done save by a man reckless with despair or with joy.

On this Matthew claps his hand on his mouth in terror, as if it was he who had sung out, and then lifting his finger crouches down on his hams, overcome with fear and expecting nothing less, I believe, than to be riddled with musket-balls the next minute. But he had cause for alarm, and I only was the fool, for now I distinctly heard over and above the echoes of my voice a cry harsh and hoarse, but like nothing human, so that I was brought to my sober senses in a moment. So we stood silent and still for the space of a minute, wondering whence this sound came (and I not much braver than Matthew), and then I fell laughing like a fool.

"See," says I, pointing to a great buzzard which was sweeping in a circle over the trees below, "there is the only enemy I have roused, and one whose flight is more to be counted on than his attack."

But Matthew would not join in my mirth, and, albeit he got back his courage presently, he was not so light of heart as he had been before, for he took this bird to be a sign of ill-omen.

"Come, master," says he, "instead of playing the fool here, let us think how we are to get t'other side this chasm, unless you are minded to rest here content. For my own part, I see no way to get across."

"Have patience with me, Matthew," says I, seeing I had wounded his feelings by laughing at his terror. "I have been so unhappy that this change in our fortune has turned my head."

"Lord love you, master," says he kindly, "I like a jest as well as any man, but hang me if I see any joking matter here, or any change of fortune to be charmed with. For at the next station De Pino will get all the Portugals he can to return with his own fellows to restore this bridge, so we are like to have a score of arquebuses against us instead of ten or a dozen."

This brought our danger and our difficulties so clearly to my mind that I grew sober at once, and began to cast about with Matthew very earnestly how we might bridge the chasm. But there was nothing there for such a purpose, and there was no way but to climb up the rocks or down until we found some jutting points by which we could scramble along the face of the mountain. After calculating by which method we were least likely to break our necks, we resolved to go upwards, yet had we to go back some way to get at any part that could be scaled. But after climbing up some fifty feet we found ourselves (thanks be to God) on a ledge of smooth rock, which we had not seen from the road below for its height and the rock that overhung it. This ledge, as I judge, had been formed by a slip in the mountain, for there a seam of glittering rock ran all along beside it; but be that as it may, it formed a level path as good as that we had quitted, and better, though mighty narrow in parts, so that it was a ticklish business to go forward, and that sideways and clinging with every nail to the rock; and the narrowest part was (as luck would have it) just over that part where the bridge had been broken away, so that we felt exceeding grateful to Providence when we were safe on the other side.

We now considered whether we should get down again into the made road, but seeing the side was still vastly steep and difficult to descend, we were content to follow our ledge, in the hope we should presently come to a part where we might

descend more easily. We had gone about a hundred yards when, looking over the side, I stopped, and called Matthew's attention to the road below.

"Lord love us, master," cried he, casting his eye down, "why, there's another bridge gone!"

There was, indeed, another great gap in the road, not less extensive than the first.

"Can you make out what this signifies?" says Matthew.

"No," says I. "'Tis no accident, that's pretty clear; and it looks as if it were done of a design to check pursuit."

"What pursuit had they for to fear?" says Matthew; "not ours, to be sure." Then scratching his head, after tilting his hat for'ard, as was his wont, he says, half aloud, as if trying to grasp the points of the problem: "They are going south; they cross the first bridge and come to the second. They destroy that so carefully that not a stick is left; go back, cross the first bridge again, and pull that down as carefully as they served the other." He could make nothing of it, which seemed to exasperate him; for he presently claps his hat back in its place, and dropping on his hands and knees, the better to survey the road, cranes over the edge of the rock, casting his eye to the right, and then to the left, and finally fixing it on the ground beneath.

"Master," says he, "do you tell me what marks you see in the road down there."

So down go I on my hands and knees, and looking intently for some time—

"I can see," says I, "the marks of the mules' feet in the dust, but whether they are turned north or south I can't make out."

"Nor I, neither," says he; "but do you see anything besides?"

"I see a trace where the hoof-marks seem to be smudged out; as if something had been dragged along the ground towards the edge of the abyss."

"That's what I mean. Now what does that argify?" he asks, getting off his hands, squatting on his heels, and once more scratching his head.

I could make no reply, but still leaned over, trying to make out these marks.

"Good God!" exclaimed Matthew, all of a sudden, "what's this?"

Turning about hastily, I found him regarding a patch on the rock just in front of where he was kneeling. Looking closer, I saw that it was almost black, yet with a purple tinge. Matthew scraped it with his nail, and as it showed deep red below the surface he looks up into my face and says, dropping his voice almost to a whisper:

"Blood!"

Glancing round he scanned the rocky ledge behind him; then suddenly he points his finger without a word to another stain not a foot off; but this told its tale more clearly, for it formed a print of an open hand; as if a wounded man, after trying to stanch the blood from a wound, had been forced to clap that hand on the rock to save him from falling into the road below.

That others had been on that ledge before us was clear enough, but it beat me to know how a wounded man could have crawled up there, or what his purpose had been.

"Come on, master," says Matthew, springing to his feet, "we must lose no time. This riddle concerns us, or I am wrong in my reckoning. God grant no mischief has come to the female; that's all I pray."

My heart was chilled to hear him speak thus, for I saw that he argued more from these signs than he chose to tell, and that he had grave fears to make him utter this prayer. I followed him close at his heels, quaking in every muscle for fear, until we came to a part where it looked possible to slide down into the road without very great danger; yet was it such a venture as we might not have made at another time, but Matthew was as desperate as I.

"Master," says he, as we lay down to slip over the edge; "we'll both let go at the same time, so that one may not have to bury the other if this hazard does our business."

So we hung over the side, and, recommending ourselves to Providence, nodded to each other, and let go. In about two minutes we slid down about fifty feet and more; but by a happy chance came upon our feet at the bottom in the middle of that narrow road, not much more bruised and torn than we had hoped for.

As soon as he had fetched breath, Matthew falls to examining the dust in the road foot by foot, going in the direction of the chasm where the bridge had been (the northernmost of the two), I following in silence, for I had not his intelligence, yet looking stupidly on the ground, as if I expected to see Lady Biddy's history writ there.

When he had come right to the edge of the gulf and could go no further, he turns to me and says very gravely:

"Master, have you got a stout heart?"

"Ay," says I; but my voice belied me, for it was feeble as a child's, knowing by this prelude that he had come to a conclusion which must be terrible to my ear.

Matthew unslung his wine-skin and bade me drink.

"For," says he, "I warn you there is a call for all your manhood."

When I had drank I bade him tell me the worst of his fears.

"Look you," says he, pointing to the dust of the road, "here are the marks of mules' hoofs, and here the prints of those great boots the Portugals wear."

"Yes," says I, waiting with a throbbing heart for what was to follow hence.

"The boot-prints go all in one direction—south; not one is turned north as I can find; but the mules' hoofs turn both south and north; and see, here is one turned north that is right in the midst of a footprint turned south."

"Go on, Matthew," says I faintly, yet with a show of courage, that he might finish.

"The Ingas have been at work. I see the hand of those murderous savages in this; yet we should not call 'em hard names neither, for they only do that for revenge which the Portugals do for gold. They dread and hate every white face, and from time to time they travel in a great band leagues and leagues to come to a place like this, where they may rid themselves of these Portugal tyrants. Here was a place after their very heart. They destroy the further bridge, and when De Pino has passed they came from their ambuscade, which, as we know, was in the rock above, and withdraw the timbers of the hither one, which they may have been loosing and preparing for weeks, and thus, when the whole train can neither go onward nor backward, they go up to the ledge again, and shoot down with their arrows from the rock above every one of their enemies. Then, when their deadly work is finished, they replace the timbers to fetch off the mules and their booty. To end all they cast down the timbers to delay discovery and give them time to escape. This is how it comes about that we see the hoofs turned north, but not a single footmark of those who went south with them."

"Out with it, Matthew!" I cries, in a passion of despair; "tell me that she is massacred with the rest—that not one has escaped!"

"Master," says he, with a great compassion in his voice, "the Ingas have no more pity for a white woman than a white man. All are gone!"

"No, no!" cries I imploringly; "'tis not so. They found the bridge broke and went back."

Without a word Matthew put his hand on my arm and pointed down to the valley where the great buzzard that I had laughed at but half an hour before was again sweeping round above the trees.

My heart stopped, and I felt it lie like a cold stone within me as I thought upon what dainty flesh this foul bird of carrion had been gorging.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WE GO DOWN INTO THAT VALLEY OF DEATH.

I knew too well what Matthew meant by this silent indication. He would have me to understand that the Ingas' slaughtered victims had been cast down the precipice (as the traces in the road bore out), and that the carrion birds were already feasting on their bodies.

My imagination could furnish forth no argument against the justice of this conclusion, and having now no hope to animate me, all about me appeared a blank, as if my heart could no longer feel, and all my faculties were stunned. So I stood there, watching the buzzard whirl round and round, as if I had nothing in the world to do but that.

I was aroused from this apathy by Matthew laying his hand on my shoulder, and saying in a gentle voice:

"Master, would it ease your mind to talk about her?"

Then I felt that I would like to pour out the grief from my heart, yet not to Matthew; so I turned away in an agony, thinking there was no one in the wide world to sympathize with me now she was gone. Who but I knew how gentle and sweet her nature was, and what words of mine could ever tell her praise as she deserved? Then recalling the sweet face, her delicate, gracious manner, the pretty tone of her voice, and in particular certain little kind words she had given me, with an encouraging look now and again, her brave habit of looking on the better side of our misfortunes to cheer me up, the dainty movement of her hands, and one or two little episodes wherein she had shown a pleasant wit—recalling these things, I say, and reflecting that they could never, never be repeated, my heart was wrung with bitter grief.

"Master," says Matthew again, seeing that I was in such great pain—"master, are you minded to find her body, and save her from those vile birds?"

I nodded eagerly; not because of my respect for the dead so much as that I longed to look once more upon that dear face, and kneel down beside her in secret, and weep, if the tears could find vent from my heart.

So we began to cast about how we might get down into that dark valley; and while I was spying below I noticed that the buzzard was perched on a point of rock about midway down, and near him were perched two others. Seeing this, a wild idea came across my mind, and calling to Matthew I bade him observe these birds, and then says I:

"Why are they there?"

He looked at me as not quite seeing my drift.

"If they are all dead below there, would those birds stand aloof? Why have they been soaring round and round above the trees this half-hour and more?"

"What you say, master," says he, "is very much to the point. Certainly they do not use to hold off in this manner, except there be sign of life in their prey. And yet" (looking down the abyss) "is it possible that any one hurled down from this height could survive the shock five minutes? Nay, even if the bough of a tree did somewhat break the fall, the poor wretch would be so broken that death were preferable to such a maimed existence."

I wasted no time in replying to this argument, for I had no thought but that my dear lady yet breathed. And I must needs think it was she of all those who had been thrown down that had escaped, though any one not distracted with a new-born hope would have seen that her frail body least of any could survive that terrible catastrophe.

I ran along the road, seeking a place to descend, with Matthew at my heels, imploring me to have a care of my own life, and not rashly expose myself to death for the sake of two minutes. However, I paid no heed to his warning, but at the first point where there seemed a possibility of climbing down the rocks to the valley I made the attempt.

"Master, master!" cries Matthew, "for the love of Heaven, don't go down there. 'Tis a hundred chances to one we be dashed to pieces that way. Look you a hundred yards ahead; there is a safer way."

"Nay," says I, "stay where you are, Matthew, or go a safer way. I make no doubt that Providence will help me here as before."

"If you go I go, master," says he, following without a moment's hesitation. "For I count upon Providence being as merciful to me as to you, though my legs be shorter."

We got down the face of that mountain-side better than we might have expected from the look of it above (though how, I knew not), and with no great hurt, thanks be to God. And now, being at the top of that slope on which the trees grew, though still a prodigious height above the bottom of the valley, we made our way over the crags and scattered stones towards that part which lay below the road between the two bridges, which we made out at a distance clearly enough, because there the rock was straight down as any wall, and its side brushed by the arms of the great pine-trees we had observed from above. When we got amongst these trees, the first sign of the Ingas' business was seen in the timbers of the bridge, of which one stood on end, held so by the boughs of the pine through which it had passed, but the rest lay splintered amongst the rocks, Matthew

said nothing, but I saw by a toss of his head and a desponding look in his face that he was asking himself how any human being could escape death by such a fall when these solid timbers had been shivered in pieces. Then perceiving we could be at no great distance from where the bodies had been flung down, I grew sick with the dread of seeing at the next footstep the crushed and mangled form of my dear lady, so that I could go no further for the weakness of my legs, but was forced to lean against a tree for support, while a cold sweat came out upon my face.

Observing my case, Matthew without a word slung round his wine-skin, which he had brought down (though our swords and all else that was dispensable we had left above), and gave me a drink, but would have me sit down to it, making out he could not lift the skin high enough else by reason it was nearly empty.

"Do you feel a bit stronger now, master?" says he kindly, when I had drunk.

"Ay," says I; "in a minute I shall be ready to go on."

While I was bracing up my courage, he silently went on a dozen paces, and then he comes to a stand, so that I knew he was in the presence of the dead; for had there been any room for hope he would not have stopped short. Then I forced myself to rise, and went to his side, where he stood with one hand on a pine-tree, looking beyond; indeed, the spectacle to be seen thence was enough to bring any one to a stand.

At another time we might have rested there in admiration of nature's handiwork, for we stood on the edge of a glade made fertile by a fountain which, springing from the mountain-side, fell into a rocky basin, and thence spread abroad over the hillside; and it seemed as if all rank and gross-growing things had been weeded out of this chosen spot, and only such plants left as might delight the eye. The trunk of every tree served as a pillar for creeping vines to twine around, and the boughs as a trellis for them to festoon and garland from end to side; which vines were gayly decked one and all with blossoms of every form and tint, so that above and around was naught but a transparent tapestry of bloom, through which the light penetrated in soft hues, as it might through the rich painted window of a cathedral; yet softer and more tender than ever I have yet seen. Then in contrast with this gorgeous canopy of color, the ground spread out all carpeted with light feather-plants and slender grasses, while here and there stood up a rock coated over with long soft moss, all of a cool greenness most refreshing to the eye.

But now it was horror that brought us to a stand, since such a loathsome sight met our eyes as would have appalled the heart of a Nero. For some distance around the herbage was beaten down and strewn with what seemed rather the refuse and outcasting of a shambles than aught else; for only on looking close could one see that this torn flesh was from the head of man, that those broken bones were of a human body, etc.

This spectacle was made more ghastly by contrast with the life, the peace, the gayety, and loveliness of its surroundings. Terrible it was to see how this wreck of humanity was wreathed about with those sweet blooms they had torn down in falling through the boughs of the trees. 'Twas as if Death had arrayed himself in mockery with the flowers of Cupid. Here trailed a spray of tender green with purple blooms over the black and festering vitals torn from the chest of an arquebusier, and there from a bed of rose-pink buds gaped out a face (which I recognized presently for Lewis de Pino's) with dull, staring eyes, and a black, protruding tongue. Nor were our eyes alone shocked by this loathsome contrast; for in place of sweet odors from the flowers we were sickened by a stench of corruption which did seem to poison every breath I drew.

My first thought (when my horror abated, and I could reason at all) was that those Ingas Matthew spoke of were a race of cannibals, who, after casting down their victims, had descended to glut their abominable appetite here at leisure and in security; yet on closer inspection I could not believe this neither, for the bodies had not been stripped, but their clothes had been torn away with the flesh from their bones, so that it looked more as if a band of famished fiends had been to this feast than any mortal creatures.

I could no longer believe that Lady Biddy lived—nay, I could not hope that she did; yet my eye wandered wildly over the ground for some trace of her. Then thinking she might yet lie hid beyond one of those many stones I have mentioned, I set out upon this horrible quest, picking my way amidst the remains of these mangled enemies.

I had not gone far when Matthew, plucking me by the sleeve, says:

"Master, that is why the carrion birds have kept aloof."

And casting my eyes whither he pointed his finger I perceived, about twenty paces away, two great spotted ounces, which the Ingas call jagoarettes, stretched out at full length in the herbage—one with his paw set on a body which he had dragged thither.

At the sound of Matthew's voice the beasts raised their heads; then, seeing us, one of them got on his feet and the other sat up on his haunches. Presently he who was on his feet bared his teeth and gave a menacing growl, lashing his tail the while from side to side.

We had taken off our swords above and left them there, as I have said, for fear they should trip us in our descent, so that we had nothing to defend ourselves with against these brutes; nor could I see anything proper for that purpose, the savages having carried off all the Portugals' weapons. So here we stood, within a few bounds of those savage ounces, with no means of attack or defense.

"Don't stir, master, for the love of Heaven," says Matthew; "if we turn tail we shall be cat's-meat for a certainty."

And now the other ounce got on his feet, and, stretching out its neck, showed its teeth, yet without growling, for they were both gorged to their full, and heavy with their food.

Seeing they were not disposed to come at us, Matthew unslings his wine-skin, and, swinging it in his hand, makes pretense to draw nigh them, as if he would take them by surprise; on which the ounces, as not knowing what to make of it, dropped their tails and shrunk back their heads. Then one of them drawing back a pace, the other takes alarm, and, turning round, trots off; and the first, being in no mind to fight, presently does the same, whereupon Matthew, hallooing with all his might, runs after them with such good effect that they set up a howl of terror and were far out of sight ere he had gone a dozen yards.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A GREAT CHANGE IN OUR FORTUNE, WHEREBY I HEAR THE MOST JOYFUL, PLEASING NEWS HEART COULD DESIRE.

The jagoaretes being gone, I advanced towards the place where they had been lying, to see what body they had dragged apart from the rest to devour. But ere I had made half a dozen paces I stopped, and the cold sweat burst out again upon my brow on observing, amidst the crushed and blood-blackened fertile plants, a fair pale body that had been stripped of clothing. At a glance I perceived that it was too slight and delicate for the corse of a man, nor could I for a moment think it was the body of a arquebusier and a Portugal. "'Tis she," thinks I, "'tis she. The savages have stripped her sweet body for their vile pleasure, or for the sake of her pretty gown; why else should this one be singled from the other bodies?" I covered my eyes with my hands to shut out the sight of that poor mangled body; yet I saw it still. All hope was gone from me, so that I had no desire to prove the truth of my conviction. Yet presently I felt that I must do my last duty by her and carry her whither those carrion birds and foul beasts might not further mutilate her mortal remains. So with my gorge rising I stepped forward again and uncovered my eyes. One arm had been torn from the trunk, but the head was untouched, and, as I turned my reluctant eyes upon it, my bitter feeling towards Providence for thus cruelly bereaving me of my darling was of a sudden changed to gratitude and thankfulness, for I perceived the face was none but that of the little Portugal boy Don Lewis had given my lady for her page.

Yet I had still my dear lady to find, and so once more I turned me round to scan once more the grizzly scene of havoc. And thus was I standing benumbed with despair when Matthew came briskly to my side, and, taking me by the arm, drew me rapidly on, saying in a low voice:

"Quick, master. Let us get back to the rocks, where we may at least have something to hurl for our defense. For though I count we have not an hour to live, yet will we sell our lives dearly, and die as becomes men."

Saying this he drew me towards a tree, and from that to another, and so to a third, as if seeking the shelter of their trunks. Yet, at the same time, edging away towards the scattered rocks at the foot of the precipice.

"Nay, friend," says I, "what is there to fear? You have scared off the ounces with your hallooing."

"Ay," says he, "and I wish to Heaven I had let 'em sleep on, and played no such silly trick; for in scaring away one enemy I have roused up another, with a plague to me. Behind that tree, master," shoving me to the right, and then adds he, "The ounces were surfeited with their meal; but these others have only had their appetite whetted for carnage."

"Which others?" says I, greatly perplexed, yet going forward as he would have me.

"The Ingas," says he; "I spied one of the naked wretches as I turned about to come back to you. He was squatting amidst the herbage at the back of us; but I reckon they have shifted their place as quick as we, and Lord knows whether we shall get amidst the rocks before they get a fair aim at us with their arrows."

Scarcely had these words passed his lips when an arrow flew past us and stuck in the tree we were about to pass.

"That's a nigh squeak," says Matthew. "Take no notice, master. Push on. If we get to yonder rock we shall have the mountain at our back for a comfort."

Another arrow flew past and stuck in a tree before us.

"That's odd," says Matthew; "they don't use to miss their mark in this manner."

Still making our way towards the rocks, a third arrow flew past with the same effect as before.

"Thrice they've missed us, and thrice hit a tree before us," says Matthew, "and every time on a level with our breasts. If this happens again, 'twill be a sign they are aiming at the trees, and not at us, though with what intent I know not."

As if his words had been heard, a fourth arrow flew by, straight to a tree a dozen paces ahead.

"We must look at that arrow, master," says Matthew. "'Tis on your side; drag it out or break it off as you pass."

Now this business had taken longer in the doing than I have spent in telling, for the rock we were making for lay at some distance, and we made a crooked way thither by reason of bobbing from one tree to another, which was labor we might have spared ourselves, for it only enabled our pursuer to arm his bow the more frequently. I make this explanation because it is the vicious practice of some men to cast doubt upon very true history since it is not of their writing; while others, by reason of their short sight, must have everything pointed out and magnified ere they will believe of its existence; but, Lord, I should never come to an end of this matter were I to set about satisfying every silly cavalier. This by the way: now to continue my history.

Going to do Matthew's bidding, I stretched out my hand to lay hold of the arrow sticking in the tree; but ere my fingers touched it I stopped short with a cry of joy.

"Lord love you, master, what's the matter?" cries Matthew.

"Look," says I, pointing to the head of the arrow buried in the soft bark. "Do you see this shred of black lace bound to the shaft?"

"Ay," says he, "and 'tis the first time I ever saw an arrow feathered in that fashion."

"'Tis part of my dear lady's gown," cries I, snatching the arrow away, and pressing the lace to my lips, with a mad hope that she lived, and that this was a token sent by her.

Another arrow, being the fifth thus discharged, shot into the trunk close by the head of the fourth; and now I gave another joyful shout, for round the head of this was bound a little lock of hair that shone in the sun like burnished copper.

"'Tis a lock of her dear hair. My dearest lady, my darling lives! she lives—she lives!" says I, with the same extravagant joy as before. "'Tis a message from her."

"That may be," says Matthew cheerily; "but one thing is certain—the Ingas mean us no harm; for they might have riddled us like so many colanders by this, had they been so minded, for all our care."

Casting our eyes about, we now spied a young Inga (as naked as Adam) standing beside a tree at about a dozen yards off, with a bow in his hand, and a sheaf of arrows, in a long wallet, slung to his shoulder. He cried out something in his own tongue, upon which Matthew (who had got the language by one of his wives) turns to me and says:

"I don't know what this fellow means, master, for he wants to know which of us saved his wife from the Portugals. However, 'tis no good to stand nice about fibs at this time, so I shall tell him you did."

"That you may with truth," says I; "for though 'twas Lady Biddy who enabled the poor woman to get free, yet I struck up the arquebuse which was leveled to shoot her down," as it suddenly came home to my mind that this Indian's wife must be that poor slave my dear lady had set free and I had saved from the shot of the arquebusier. This history I gave to Matthew now, and he gave it again to the Inga, who, not liking this sign of hesitation, asked sternly (still with his arrow on the bow) why he had not answered at once before consulting me.

"Lord love you, master," says Matthew (as he afterwards told me), "Englishmen are so used to practising charity that we had to think a moment to recollect such a trifle as that. I'm an Englishman," he adds hastily, for fear the Inga might be minded to despatch him as having no personal call on his gratitude.

"Ask him," says I, "if Lady Biddy, who had his wife freed from her yoke, lives." When, in response to this question, the Inga bowed his head, I rushed forward with my arms wide to embrace him, for my joy knew no bounds. He let me take his hand in mine, and smiled kindly to see how I was moved; for he also had lost and found, being, as I say, the husband of that poor slave my Lady Biddy had saved. Then from the bottom of his wallet he drew out a piece of the lace my dear lady had given him, and also a thick tress of her hair; showing me that he had yet half a dozen arrows in his sheaf bound like those already shot.

"Master," says Matthew, who had moved up to my side, and was still in a mighty taking lest the Inga should do him a mischief, "while he is in a good humor do you put in a sign or two to signify I am your friend."

So I turned about, and grasped Matthew's hand without pretense (for I felt that I owed him my life and happiness), to show that I loved him much.

The Inga ceased to smile, and regarded Matthew from top to toe in silence; for these hunted Indians have need of all precautions, being so frequently tricked by treacherous Portugals; and he was the more doubtful of Matthew because he spoke the Inga tongue in the manner of those accursed Portugals.

"Oh, Lord!" says Matthew, "he don't like the look of me."

Then the Inga put many searching questions to him sharply, and might more readily have believed his replies but that poor Matthew, being of a quake of his life, did rub his hands together as if he were a-washing them, cringing and smiling like any chandler, which was altogether the wrong way to win over an Inga; for they are a proud race, but not sycophants. However, in the end this Inga laid his hand on Matthew's breast (as he had on mine) for a sign of faith and friendship, which brought a huge sigh of content from the bottom of the honest fellow's heart.

"For," says he, "if we are to go amongst these Indians, I shall stand in need of a friend, lest one of 'em knows me for having married into his family without consent of the parents."

"Ask," says I, "where Lady Biddy lies, and when I shall see her."

When Matthew had put the question, the Inga pointed to the southwest; and then turning his hand towards the sun lowered it to the horizon, to indicate that we should not overtake her before sunset. After looking around him once more searchingly, he bade Matthew be silent, and so led the way down the hillside. But for all this warning Matthew could not help communicating his thoughts to me in a low tone now and then, for he was a generous-hearted fellow in all things, and was as fond of the sound of his own voice as any starling.

"Look you, master," says he, "how gentleness does rule the world above all the craft and cunning of the wicked; for while these sinful Portugals could not compass the ruin of an unprotected maid with all their might, one act of love on her part has brought about their overthrow, and saved us from the arrows of this Inga."

"Ay, Matthew," says I; "and if we take Lady Biddy home to her friends, 'twill be due to your mercy when I lay a prisoner in the guardhouse."

"Mercy!" says he; "'twas nothing of the sort; 'twas but a yearning to hear honest English once more, for not one of my wives could I ever bring to speak it."

In this manner we whispered our thoughts when the difficulty of getting to the bottom of that valley did not interfere.

At length we came down to the side of that river we had passed upon our way to Valetta; and here Matthew begged the Inga to stay awhile and eat a bit of cold roast mutton and a crust of bread with us, as we were pretty nigh spent one way and another, having taken no food since daybreak. The Inga agreed to this, and we shared what was left of our food, and drained the wine-skin.

"Master," says Matthew to the Inga, "are we going to cross the river?"

The Inga nodded.

"I thought as much," says Matthew. "And we're to swim it?"

Again the Inga nodded.

"Now should I be in a bad way but for this wine-skin," says Matthew, "for I can swim no further than a frog may fly."

"And how is your wine-skin to help you, friend?" says I.

He winked his roguish eye, and putting his lips to the empty skin blew into it until it was full of his breath and tight as any blown bladder.

"There," says he, tying up the mouth, "with that in my arms I'll kick myself to the other shore for a wager."

CHAPTER XLIX.

MY LADY BIDDY AND I MEET AGAIN, TO OUR JOYFUL CONTENTMENT.

About sunset (as the Inga had promised) we came to the place where his tribe were encamped, which was amidst the mountains on the further side of the river, approached by a very intricate winding way, and so encompassed with sharp, high rocks that no man not acquainted with those parts might find his way thither, though he searched a lifetime.

Coming through this tortuous defile to an open space, the Inga, being in advance some paces, suddenly came to a halt, and, turning to me, pointed in silence to a little rising hillock not far distant, where stood my Lady Biddy, shielding her eyes from the rays of the setting sun with her hand, and scanning the valley below.

For a moment my heart stood still, feeling as if it must burst with the great joy that flooded it. I think I must have cried aloud in my gladness (though I know not what I did), for she turned that moment like a startled doe, and came running down the hillock with her hands stretched out. So I flew to her, and we stood clasping each other's hands and gazing into each other's faces, she with a look of gladness in her face, yet a sad reproach in her eyes, as though she would ask me why I had been so long a-coming. But neither of us could say one word; so with a quick impulse, as if our two minds were but one, our silent, trembling lips drew together, and we exchanged the first kiss they had known since we were boy and girl.

This kiss was none but such as a brother and a sister might have shared; 'twas not the passionate overthrow of modesty which covers a maiden's face with blushes, and makes a man's limbs tremble under him; 'twas simply the overflowing of a sweet, innocent affection that can find no other mode of expression. After that kiss we looked in each other's hearts with open, unwinking eyes, and hands still clasped.

"Benet," says she faintly, "how long we have been sundered!"

"Have we?" says I, leading her to a little boulder where there was room for us to sit together.

"Why, an age!" says she, with a return of her usual merry laugh. "Have you not missed me?"

"Now I come to think of it," says I, "there has been trouble in my heart; but my joy is so great to be with you again that the past seems naught but an evil dream. And 'twas no more than a dream, the worst part of it; for one while I imagined you lost beyond recovery, and another while I imagined you dead and eat up by tigers; but this is real, and no idle fancy," holding her sweet fair hand up to look at it and make sure I was not stark mad. "But, Lord," says I, dropping my voice for pity, "'tis much thinner than it was."

"Ay, I shall be a sad old witch to look at ere long," says she; "'tis well I have no glass to look into."

"Trust me for a faithful mirror," says I, "when I tell you that you never looked so sweet as now."

Indeed, I said no more than the truth, as far as my judgment went in this matter; yet I saw that her face was not so round as of old, and her skin was rarely pale, so that her eyes looked larger, darker, and more lustrous thereby. And thinking how she must have suffered by fright, etc., to have lost flesh and blood in this sort, I was greatly moved with compassion.

"A joyful heart makes a bright face," says she; "but what would it have been like had the Indians come back without you? What would have become of me?"

"Nay," says I, "These Ingas would never have harmed you."

"Is that all?" says she. "Do you think I hold your affection so lightly that I could have lived to forget you?"

Thus might our conversation have run on till she had expressed all that it was in her simple, affectionate heart to say to her kinsman, but that I became silent. For the pressure of her hand and kind looks did stir my smouldering passion and fan it to a flame, so I had much ado to restrain myself from flinging my arms about her waist and drawing her to my breast.

All the love that a warm-souled woman has for a dear brother she wished to bestow on me, but I had more than innocent love in my heart. Still, I had the sense to see that my own happiness, as well as hers, would be blighted if I let my mad desire be known, and I had also the strength to control it (God be praised!). Still, I dared not trust myself too far, and counted it best to let go her hand, and talk of other matters. So getting up, as if I would look about me, I begged her to give me an account of all that had happened to her. Whereupon she rose also, and slipping her hand through my arm walked beside me up and down that pleasant spot, in the waning twilight, telling me of her adventures; how Lewis de Pino had told her I was gone on with the first part of the train, seeming in an ill-humor, which appeared less remarkable to Lady Biddy because I had been particularly dull the day before; how, as they went on and came not up with me, she grew alarmed, yet had no means of discovering whether Lewis de Pino had told the truth or not, and so of force went on, yet with a sinking heart; how, being brought to a stand in that narrow road in the mountain-side by the bridge being gone, they were attacked with arrows from above in such sort that the arquebusiers only succeeded in wounding one of the Ingas, and were themselves shot down one after the other till not a man was left, even to the Indian stripling who served De Pino for a page; how the Indians then coming down from above, she recognized amongst them that poor slave whom she begged De Pino to take from her yoke; and how finally the

dead Portugals, being rifled of their arms, were cast down over the precipice, the slaves liberated from their bonds, and they, with my lady (who from first to last had been treated with the utmost respect and courtesy), led back along the mountain-path till they came to a narrow way, by which they descended to the river. Also she told me how with signs she had given the Inga girl to understand her trouble about me, which she (being of a quick wit) readily comprehended, and, bringing forward her husband with further signs, bade her know that I should be sought and brought safely to her, etc. All these particulars agreed so well with what Matthew had suggested, and I have set down, that I need not dwell upon them, but may get on at once with fresh matter.

The light faded away over the western mountains till there was naught but a faint glow beyond the dark peaks, and still we strolled up and down, discoursing to one another of our various fortunes; and so forgetful was I of my late fatigue in the delight of these moments that it did not enter my head for some time that my lady might be weary; but suddenly bethinking myself of my selfish disregard to her comfort I begged to know if she was not weary.

"No," says she gayly; "'tis a relief to talk again, for I was getting heart-sick of silence. But you, Benet?—men do not care to chatter as we women do."

"Nay," says I, "you may be sure that I shall never weary of listening till you weary of talking." And then I ventured to tell her that I counted this the very happiest moment of my life. Upon which she gave my arm a little kindly pressure with her hand, which sent a thrill of inexpressible delight through every nerve of my being.

And so she began to gossip again as merrily as before, which was a great comfort to me, for I could have found never a word to say at this time for the tumult of joy in my heart. I would have lingered there till morning broke, feeling her hand so lightly lying on my arm, and listening to the sweet purling of her gentle voice; but presently spying Matthew, who had drawn up at a respectful distance, and stood there humming and coughing as if he would speak with me, but dared not approach, I bethought me that I had not yet introduced the faithful fellow to Lady Biddy. So I called to him, and when he drew near, scraping and shuffling with his hat in hand, I said:

"This is Lady Biddy Fane, Matthew."

"Your ladyship's humble and obedient servant," says he, with another scrape.

"My cousin has been talking about you, Matthew," says she, offering her hand to him; "and I hope you will forgive me being so tardy in acknowledging my gratitude, for in helping him you have befriended me."

"As for your ladyship's gratitude," says he, "I hope I may yet lay better claim to it; and as for tardy acknowledgment, I count you were better occupied; while as for the rest," adds he, "I wish you joy of your sweetheart."

At these words all the blood rushed into my face, and happy was I there was little light to reveal my confusion to Lady Biddy.

"How?" cries I angrily; "have I ever spoken so disrespectfully of my lady that you should take the liberty to speak of me in this relation?"

"Lord love you, master! no," says he; "but 'twas because you always spoke of her ladyship with such mighty respect that I reckoned she must be something more to you than a cousin. I meant no offence; and, indeed," adds he, with ready wit, "'twould have been but a mean compliment to her ladyship's charms or your understanding if I had set you down for aught but her admirer."

"Ay," says Lady Biddy, laughing, "and so should I." But I observed that she was a little more reserved towards me after this, as if she perceived the imprudence of giving expression to those feelings of simple, innocent affection which I might take for an acknowledgment of warmer sentiment.

CHAPTER L.

WE TAKE COUNSEL OF THE INGAS AS TO OUR FUTURE, ETC.

Matthew's business was to tell us that the Ingas were waiting to hold council with us. As soon as we heard this we hastened from that pleasant, retired spot where we had been strolling, as I have said, to join them, not without some self-reproach for so slighting those to whom we owed better civility; but, to tell the truth, I had clean forgot those good Indians, for where my sweet lady stood was all the world to me, and I was indifferent to all outside it.

Coming beyond those jutting rocks which had screened us from view we perceived the Ingas' camp. They had built a fire upon the further side of a little lake, fed by a stream running from the mountains, in the midst of the hollow, and here sat a score of Indians handling the arquebuses taken from the Portugals, and examining them by the light of the fire. At a little distance a dozen of their women were grouped together on their mats, about a pile of pack-saddles and merchandise. Hard by stood a couple of tents of rush mats, very curiously woven and stained. These objects, lit up by the dancing flames of the fire, with the deep shade of the rocks beyond, were a pleasure to see for all who love pictures of strange things; but that which gave it the finishing touch was an Inga with his spear, who stood on a high rock, keeping guard, and cut the rising moon in two halves with his dark, handsome figure.

When the Indians spied us approaching they rose to their feet, and their captain, coming to meet us with a very noble and courtly carriage, laid his hand on my breast, and I did likewise by him, seeing this was their mode of greeting. Then the Indian woman whose life I had saved came forward and went through the same ceremony; but, this done, she slipped beside my Lady Biddy and began to fondle her hand, stroking it gently, lifting it up to her cheek, etc., which I thought very pretty.

I begged Matthew to make my apologies to the captain for not having paid my respects to him; but this he would not do, telling me these Ingas were a mighty touchy sort of people in trifles, and were as like as not to take an apology as an admission of wrong, and a mean trick of getting cheaply out of a mess one ought never to have got into.

"How'mever," says he, "I have settled that matter by telling him that an Englishman's first duty is to pay his services to the females of his tribe, and, that being done, you are now at liberty to devote all your attention to him."

In this matter it seemed to me Matthew showed more sense than I or many better cultivated men, who never meet without some paltry excuse or other.

The Indians meanwhile led us to the tent, where a supper had been laid out on a mat, and insisted very civilly on our eating before entering upon business: then they withdrew to their place by the fire, where a space was left in their midst for us, every man smoking tobacco, for I believe there is no people in the world so given to the use of this herb.

When we had finished our meal, we escorted Lady Biddy to the second tent, which had been given for her use, Matthew telling us that the Indians never speak of their affairs before the sex. "Though why not," says he, "I can not say, except it be that their females are given overmuch to talk, which leads to blabbing of secrets."

Lady Biddy retained us a minute at the entrance to her tent to show how Wangapona, her Indian friend, had decked the floor with soft blooms of flowers, and bound knots of bright feathers to the head and foot of the net which served her as a bed; also placing for her use a bowl of fresh water, in which floated certain fruits to give it flavor and sweetness. Then bidding each other farewell, with a fervent wish that we might sleep peacefully, we separated; but she did not again offer to let me kiss her.

Coming to the fire with Matthew, we sat down with the Indians, and accepted of their tobacco-sticks, which they call zigaroes; and now, all smoking like so many chimneys, the chief spoke to the matter in hand, every one listening in solemn silence. And first of all he bade Matthew tell me that every enemy of the Portugals and Spaniards was regarded by them as a friend.

"Ay," says the chief, in his tongue, "we spare the lives of those serpents and jagoaretes that haunt the woods they hunt, and pray to our god, the Sun, not to dry up the festering marshes that poison the air they breathe, but to nourish with his rays all venomous fruits that they may eat, all loathsome reptiles whose fangs and stings may taint their blood, and to give strength to those beasts who tear their flesh and break their bones."

"Our forefathers," he goes on, "were mighty kings, and the meanest of our people lived in palaces, to which the richest abodes of these accursed Portugals are but dens and hovels. Our people spurned under their feet the gold for which our enemies sell their souls. Our men were wise; our women were faithful; our children were obedient: all were happy. Then came this troop of ravening jagoaretes into our slumbering camp. Jagoaretes! Nay, 'tis an insult to the divine Sun to compare the basest beast he has fashioned to a Portugal. The jagoarete kills; he does not yoke our warriors with oxen and scar their backs with whips; he does not put chains upon our hopeful boys and doom them to lifelong pain; he does not force our innocent maids to bear a race of slaves."

"Lord love us, master," says Matthew, after translating this to me, "I hope he isn't going to make a capital offence of this trifle."

"We are unhappy," continues the Inga, sinking his voice to a tone of mournful sadness. "Who can laugh in the still night? The very flowers hang their heads: in the morning you will find tears in their eyes. Our sun has sunk. Will it ever rise again?"

"Ay, that it will, I warrant," says Matthew to him stoutly.

The Indians held up their hands as a warning not to interrupt the chief.

"They are numberless as chesketaws^[3] on the lagoons; they suck our blood like vampires in the night; we have no arms against them. We are scattered over the land like leaves after a tornado. Thus scattered, what can we do against our clustering enemies? We are hunted into the mountains and the desert; but even there our homes are not safe. The world is too small to give refuge to the Inga. There is no limit to the envious greed of our enemies; no bounds to their cruel spite. They want gold, but they will not buy it of us, for that would give us power and the means to live. They would not have a single Inga free, but all should be their slaves, to wear yokes and chains, and toil for them without hope. Is it all darkness?" says he piteously, looking round him; "is there no hope? Yes," cries he, facing the moon and stretching up his arms; "while the bride smiles, her god lives, and the moon's god is our god—the great father of all."

With this he slowly sank into his place upon the mat, saying never another word; and thus ended his speech, which seemed to me to be very fine for such as he to deliver.

After a few minutes' silence, given in respect to the chief, that his words might be duly digested, another Inga rose and spoke, and his speech was more practical and to the purpose. He said the tribe bore us a great affection, not only because we were enemies to the Portugals, but also because in the face of that foe I had dared to strike up the musket leveled at the breast of Wangapona. As our true friends, they were prepared to give more consideration to our wishes than their own, and therefore the first thing they wished to know was in what manner they might serve us.

I told Matthew to ask if they could give us an idea of our position with regard to the sea; upon which the chief, taking a stick of wood, spread out the ashes of the fire in a plain to represent the face of the earth; then, with a handful of ashes, he built up a very fair presentment of the mountains, and after that traced furrows to show the course of rivers. That river we had crossed he called the Attrato, and another still a good distance to the west of the mountains where we lay he called the Cauca, and one yet further west the Magdalena (though he had another name for it), which joins the Cauca at some distance from its disembogement. He also showed another stream rising from the mountains called the Meta, and this he assured us flowed into the Baraquan or Oronoque, through his knowledge of the country in that part was limited to hearsay.

"Now, Matthew," says I, "what are we to do? Our nearest way to the coast will be to follow the Cauca, and get into the Magdalena, which flows into the sea somewhere about Cartagena."

"Ay," says he, "but we must know if we are likely to flow with it into the hands of the Portugals."

To this question on this subject the Ingas replied that the whole of that coast was overrun with Portugals, who had, besides, several settlements on the Magdalena. They offered to guide us as far as they might go in safety, but could give us no encouragement of escaping our enemies.

"Then," says I, "we must strike out for the Meta, and so get to the Baraquan, where I doubt if any Portugals are to be met with."

The Ingas said they had heard of no enemies save certain tribes of hostile Indians on the Baraquan, and promised to guide us to the Meta, which they counted as three weeks' journey.

"If we take three weeks to get to the embers," says Matthew, regarding the plan of ashes, "Lord only knows when we shall get t'other side of the fire."

While we were discussing this difficulty, the Indians argued upon the possibility of descending the Meta.

"It seems to be a plaguy difficult job, master, even to these fellows, who are used to traveling those parts," says Matthew. "The open country is impassable by reason of the woods; and the river is not much better traveling, by reason of divers cataracts, lakes, and blind inlets, where one may be lost as in a maze, to say nothing of one part where we must go a hundred miles out of our way to avoid a race of hungry cannibals."

"Ask them," says I, "if they can offer any alternative by which we may come to our friends."

Upon this question a great discussion ensued, in which Matthew took part.

"Well, Matthew," says I, growing impatient, "what is it all about?"

"To begin with, master," says he, "when I told them we wished to join our friends, they put the very pertinent question, 'Where are they?' That was a poser. Hows'mever, for the glory of our country, I replied that Englishmen were to be found pretty nearly everywhere, especially where they are not wanted. At present, I told 'em, we were pretty well occupied in sweeping the seas of the Portugals, that we had made a very good beginning, and that when we had finished that business we should undoubtedly step ashore and turn them out of Guiana. But as we did not wish to wait here till then, we should take it as a kindness if they would put us in the way of getting to some part of the coast where there were no Portugals, and we might keep a smart lookout for a passing vessel of our own people."

"Was that the whole subject of discussion?" says I, when he paused.

"No, master. They don't doubt anything I said, and are ready to believe that our ships are as plentiful in the seas as herrings. But herrings are not always to be caught when they are wanted, and the possibility of our having to wait on the shore a week before being picked up by a passing Englishman lays open the difficulty of finding any spot on the coast where we are not likely to be picked up first by a passing Portugal. The west and north coasts are to be put out of the question. The only coast that may be safe is that they know nothing about, to be reached only by the Baraquan, of which they know as little."

"Then all this talk has resulted in nothing?" says I.

"No, master, it has not, but the subject will have to be sifted out by us slowly; and so I will let them know that we will give their proposal the consideration it deserves, and let them know our decision in the morning."

The reply he gave evidently pleased the Ingas, who, bidding us good-night after their fashion, lay down to sleep, while Matthew and I strolled in the moonlight to consider the proposal they had made.

CHAPTER LI.

MATTHEW AND I CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION, BUT WITH SMALL PROFIT.

"Master," begins Matthew, "the Ingas would have us go to their village, which lies, as I take it, among the mountains to the west, nigh that river Meta they have spoken about."

"There need be no hesitation in agreeing to that," says I; "for whether we resolve to make for the north seaboard board or the west, this village lies all in our way."

"You are in the right," says he; "but they would have us stay there."

"That needs no consideration neither," says I; "for we have no mind to become Ingas."

"Not so fast, master; hear me out," says he. "They would have us stay there until they have drawn together their scattered people in such force as we may assault the Portugals, and take one of their ports."

"That is easier said than done, Matthew."

"Ay," says he; "like descending the Baraquan, but with this difference—that in attacking a town we can ascertain pretty fairly what opposition we shall have to encounter, and what force we have to overcome it; while in t'other affair there's no knowing what obstacle may stand in our way, or what accidents of sickness and the like may happen to enfeeble us. Look you, master, the furthest an Englishman has penetrated into Guiana by the Oronoque is a matter of thirty or forty leagues, and that with the succor of lusty fellows well armed with boats and stores; now, what we two men, with no arms but what we can beg of the Ingas, and no stores but what we may carry on our backs, propose to compass is a journey through that same Guiana by untrodden ways and broken waters—a distance of three or four hundred leagues, as I reckon; and with a female, remember. Likewise I would have you reflect that ere we are many months on our way, we shall be overtaken by the rain, when we must seek high ground, or be swept away by the floods and torrents that pour through the valleys. For you and me a month or two of misery, more or less, may count for nothing; but how is the female to stand it, with not a dry thread to her back, and, as like as not, never a bit of shoe to her foot?"

This perspective was terrible enough, and yet, as I saw not overdrawn, but indeed favorable in comparison with the image that presented itself to my mind, of my poor lady falling sick under the hardships of privation, and having no shelter but chilly rocks, no remedy, no comfort, nor any hand to render those services which a woman can only receive from a woman.

"Now, Matthew," says I, "let me hear what you have to say in favor of t'other venture, for I see which song your voice is most in tune for."

"I will say what I think, master," says he, showing greater patience with me than I with him, "for I have no wish you should count me wiser or more foolish than I am. Yet that you may not be disinclined to the Ingas' design by thinking my wishes lead me to set it out in a fairer light than it deserves, I must tell you that I have no relish for meddling with the Portugals. I have seen enough of 'em to satisfy my stomach to the last day of my life, and would rather end my days in a wilderness than under the walls of a town. Anyhow, master, I will try to let you see their project as they laid it out to me. This tribe numbers about a hundred men and boys; females count for nothing. Ten of their number will be left with us in the village; the rest will go out to rouse up other tribes and bring them to their purpose. They will take with them the Portugals' muskets, as a proof of what they have done, and I warrant it will count for something in their inducement that they have for allies a couple of Englishmen who are accustomed to whipping Portugals; for it is certainly in the knowledge of these Indians that we beat them out of Cartagena in years gone by."

"How many Indians do they think to muster in this business?"

"Betwixt three and four hundred, according to the general opinion, and that within a month."

"Say they gather together all that they hope for," says I, "what can a band of naked savages do against a town fortified with guns and defended by trained soldiery, Matthew?"

"In the first place, master, let me tell you, 'tis no inconvenient to fight without clothes in these parts. As for their guns, I doubt if they will ever get a chance of firing at us. We shall take the town by surprise, for these Ingas know how to march easily through the woods by ways unknown to the Portugals. Against the trained soldiery we shall bring ten arquebuses, with good account, I'll answer for it, with galore of bows, blow-guns, and pikes, all wielded by fellows who are fighting for liberty and life."

"Supposing we carry the town, as very probably we may, what then? Unless every soul in the place is massacred the news must be carried to the Portugals, who will lose no time in sending ships and men to recover it. Supposing the Ingas can withstand an assault, how long can they stand out against an organized siege?"

"Why, that's their lookout," says Matthew. "What we have at heart is getting out of Guiana, and it will be odd indeed if we can't get some sort of craft to bear us thence ere the Portugals come down to lay siege to the place."

"What," says I, "would you desert the Ingas after leading 'em into this pitfall?"

"Nay," says he, "'tis their own wish to go there, and they know full well we have no wish to stay."

"Ay," says I; "but did you warn them of the vengeance the Portugals will certainly take? No! On the other hand, with your prating of our prowess on the sea, and the multitude of our ships, and drubbings in store for the Portugals, you may have led them to believe that we should come back with ships and men to help them, which can never be while we stand at peace with the Portugal."

Matthew scratched his head in silence for a minute, and then says he:

"'Twould be a scurvy trick to leave the poor fellows to fight the next battle alone, and that's a fact. If they could only hold their own—or anybody else's."

"But they can not, so we must set our faces against their design."

"I don't mind standing by 'em, master, if you're minded to let me take the responsibility of this business on my own shoulders. I warrant there's not a soul alive in England who remembers me, or would care to see me again."

"And what would become of you, my poor fellow?" says I, touched by the sadness of his speech. "Do you think you could hold the town against the Portugals?"

"No," says he; "but I wager I'd thin down the rascals before they took it from me."

"Come," says I, "let us think of something else, for you must know this can never be."

So I turned my thoughts to the Baraquan, and gloomy enough they were, so that I had not a word to say; but Matthew, though his hopes were dashed, still revolved the Ingas and their design in his mind, as it appeared, for presently, breaking silence, he says:

"I had no notion these Ingas were such a fine set of fellows, which only proves once again that we should never judge of a flock of sheep by the ewes in the pen."

"Why," says I, "did you not find your wives amiable and kind?"

"Ay," says he; "but what does a man want of such trumpery as amiability and kindness?" (As I have tried to show, he was himself remarkable for these qualities.) "Can you tell me anything about these Ingas, master, for I am no schollard?"

"Nor I neither, Matthew," says I. "I know no more of these people than what I have learnt from you and my own limited observation."

"You know enough to perceive they are better than the common ruck of mankind, I warrant," says he, "for they have the bearing and proud carriage of a noble race not used to base practices. For my own part I feel I could trust 'em with my life—as long as they learn nothing to my discredit."

"Ay," says I, "they do seem, as you say, a noble race of men."

"Then what a thousand pities it is," says he, "that they should be hunted from their homes, and worried to death by such a pack of dirty dogs as these Portugals."

I made no reply. Nor did he continue his theme for some time, but strolled beside me in silence, which was odd in him, who was wont to utter his thoughts as they came into his head. Yet I perceived his mind was still occupied, for, taking off his hat for the greater convenience of scratching his head, he would now and again give his thigh a slap with it, muttering occasionally betwixt his teeth, though I could catch no words but "dirty dogs of Portugals," and the like.

CHAPTER LII.

MATTHEW LAYS OUT A SCHEME FOR STAYING FIVE YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS.

"What a plague it is, master," says Matthew presently—"what a plague it is for a man who has no learning to get a good notion in his mind. Here am I like a young blackbird who feels he has the makings of a sweet song in his head, and yet can do no more than squeak out of tune."

"Nay, then," says I, "do as the blackbird does—strive to sing, and I warrant the tune will come in time."

"Well, master," says he, "to begin with, do you think these Ingas, if they gathered together and made head against the Portugals, might recover themselves some little corner of their territory, where they could live in peace like Christians, and trade with other nations?"

"The difficulty is," says I, "to get them to combine steadfastly for any length of time, for, according to their own showing, they are divided into a hundred tribes, each more or less hostile to the other."

"Why," says he, "that is but the outcome of their misfortunes, for no men are so snappish as those who suffer continual persecution. Do think how ill-tempered and cross-grained a wife will be who has a tyrant for a husband, and how buxom and cheerful she is whose spouse is kind. These poor fellows are fighting for their lives. The Portugals will not trade with them, or suffer others to trade, so that they get no comfort, and are forced to seek subsistence in the woods; then if one finds a good cover of game he must hold it against others in order that he may exist."

"All that is very true," says I; "but how can their case be remedied?"

"By such economy as is practiced among people who have not half their resources. What would become of our peasants, master, if they lived only on what they could find in the woods? Now if these Ingas pitched upon a fertile and healthy valley beyond the range of the Portugals, they might enclose fields and breed creatures for their food; they might till the ground and grow proper fruits and grain, so that they would no longer have to go far afield for game and fight their brethren to hold it."

"And how would you have them till the ground when they have no iron plowshares?"

"As for that, master," says he, "I have seen the earth tilled with a stick in Cornwall; but these might make plowshares of gold if they were so minded."

I laughed at this notion, but bade him go on, seeing this objection was but a trifle.

"Well, master," says he, "I take it, they must have more comfort by this way of living than they now can get; and other tribes, seeing their state, would willingly enough come to partake their contentment. There would still be much lacking to their estate; but by laying their plans carefully, and preparing themselves with arms and leaders, they might in the end take some port from the Portugals, where the country about would give them protection against assault, and so come about to open trade with any nation who wished to take their commodity in exchange for what the Ingas need."

"Hold, Matthew," says I, "what commodity have these Ingas to dispose of?"

"Lord love you, master," says he, "they have that which no other nation ever yet refused—gold! The Ingas, with their knowledge of these mountains, can easily produce you gold by the bushel; while the Portugals, with pain, get it by the thimbleful. And look you, master, once the traders know where they can get gold cheap, they will take means to prevent the Portugals again closing that port. The project may seem wild at the first glance, as many another achievement has looked in the beginning, but is it impossible?"

"It is not impossible," says I; "but the Ingas must be taught."

"To be sure, master. And they are willing enough to learn. All they need is a leader, as appears clearly from their seeking our help against the Portugals."

"Ay," says I, "but where is this teacher to be found?"

"Not a great way off, master. In a word," says he, "you are the man who may save thousands from destruction by the Portugals, and raise up these poor Ingas from misery and despair to happiness and prosperity."

This proposal did fairly take away my breath, and ere it came again for me to speak, Matthew continues: "When I tell the Ingas that you refuse to save yourself by the means they suggest, because they could not hold the town and would suffer disaster, they must needs regard you with respect and admiration, for the virtues they do most prize are sagacity and generosity. Thus will they be well disposed to listen to a scheme for their surer advantage, especially when they know that you will not leave them until they are in a condition to maintain the independence of the state you have set up."

"And how long do you reckon it will take to carry out your project, Matthew?" says I.

"Why, master, I count we may do a good deal in four or five years."

"Five years!" says I, with a gasp.

"Ay, master; but that's not half the time it would take to get down the Oronoque. And what are five years when you are happily and profitably occupied? Will it be a great joy to you to know that you are redeeming these poor folks?"

"Ay, to be sure," says I; "but Lady Biddy?" For she had been in my mind all this time.

"Why, master, I mistake her ladyship if she is the sort to sit down and cry for farthingales in the midst of wild woods. No, I do rather count upon her entering cheerfully into this business, and teaching the women, as you teach the men, with good result for her pains, and the blessing of every wife and mother that wears a tawny skin."

"Ay," says I, "they could not fail to be happier for her tenderness."

"No, master, nor she for having such a scope for her tenderness. There's many a thing I might teach 'em for I have earned wages as a blacksmith and a carpenter in my time. And if lords, as I have heard, do live to get drunk, to hunt, and go gallanting, then may you live here like the best of 'em; for," says he, dropping into his customary vein of humor, "you may have a score of sweethearts, and not a man to say you nay; hunt without fear of trespassing on another lord's preserves; and 'twill be odd if amongst the blessings of civilization we can not make up some sort of liquor to get drunk on."

CHAPTER LIII.

MY CONSCIENCE GETS THE BETTER OF DESIRE, AND A BIRD BRINGS GREAT JOY TO MY DEAR LADY.

"Master," says Matthew, "let us try and snatch a wink of sleep, for 'tis late, and the Ingas are early risers. Moreover, we shall do well to see how this design appears in the daylight, for I have known many a scheme that wore an excellent complexion overnight—like certain females—not worth two straws in the morning. Indeed," adds he, "we might with advantage keep this business to ourselves and say not a word of it to any one until we know these Ingas better, and judge whether they are ripe enough or too far gone for preservation."

I could but agree with him in this prudent suggestion, and so we bade each other good-night, and laid ourselves down in a pleasant spot.

But I could not close an eye all the night for considering of this mighty project, and the more I thought about it the more I liked it. Yet was I not so blind but that I perceived the difficulties which lay in the way of one man raising a downtrodden and helpless people into a body of such force as to overthrow the Portugals and hold their own hereafter. I knew I was only an ordinary man, with no special aptitude for governing men; nevertheless I thought that, with Lady Biddy at hand to temper my judgment with her practical good sense, I might yet manage to come out pretty well in the end.

And so all through the night I lay revolving my plans for the future without perceiving the folly of them any more than if I had been reasonably sleeping and these thoughts had taken the form of a dream.

As soon as the Ingas began to stir I roused up Matthew, who was so heavy with sleep that I believe he would have willingly abandoned his scheme of regenerating the Indians on the moment for the sake of another five minutes' doze, and bade him let our friends know at once that we could have nothing to do with their plan of attacking the Portugals.

"Nay," says he, "I'll hold my tongue on that matter until we have decided upon t'other; they will more readily believe in your wisdom if they see you are not in a hurry."

If I had taken these words to heart I might have seen what a fool I was; for here had I settled to take upon myself the most serious responsibility with rather less hesitation than I should have given to swallowing a toadstool.

We journeyed all that day and the next through the mountains, coming a little before nightfall within sight of the river Cauca; but we were still at a prodigious height, so that we were forced to rest there again.

An Inga pointed down to a part of the valley where their village lay, but we could see nothing of it for the woods that lay everywhere about like a thick mat. The sight of these vast unbroken woods took me aback somewhat, for my imagination had figured some gentle grassy slope that would serve as pasturage for our cattle; and Matthew seemed likewise to have fostered a pleasing hope of open country, for turning to me, with a rueful look in his honest face and round eyes, he says—

"Master, I perceive we shall have to go a-felling trees."

"We shall see," says I, putting on an air of indifference; "from this point to be sure, the land looks somewhat encumbered" (he nodded assent), "but we may find elsewhere a space where there are not so many trees."

"I hope to God we may, master," says he, "for, besides that, these trees are mighty big, and most of 'em like any iron and brass for toughness; I doubt if the Ingas have ever a saw or a hatchet to lay our hands to."

We turned away in silence, and I think Matthew was nothing loth to set the subject aside and go to sleep in quiet and peace, for I had kept him awake all the night before laying out my schemes, consulting him as to the building of houses, the digging of water-courses, the setting up of smithies, workshops, and the like—indeed my enthusiasm bore me along to such lengths that towards daybreak I got naught but grunts in reply to my questions, for the fellow, though he continued to keep his body in a sitting posture, could no longer manage to resist sleep. Nor had I grown cool upon this business during the day, but whenever occasion offered to talk with Matthew privily, I pursued the same theme, so that I do truly believe there was nothing left unsaid. Wherefore, as I say, he was in nowise put out by my present silence, but hied him to a remote place where he might lie at full length and sleep with his ears shut.

Going back with the Ingas to where the tents had been set up, we were met by Lady Biddy and Wangapona, who held her hand. The girl ran to her husband's side, and I, taking my lady, led her to the point that overlooked the valley. On the way she laughed merrily as she told me of her endeavor to learn a few Indian words from Wangapona; but being come there she became of a sudden silent, and looked over that immense sweep of wilderness that stretched from our feet right down to the river, and then up to the mighty mountains beyond, in wondrous admiration. And when she spoke, her voice was awed to a low tone.

"How magnificently grand it is, Benet," says she, "and yet how melancholy! These mountains and forests—so old, so grand, so silent—seem to reproach us for spending our little life so lightly."

"Is the reproach merited?" says I; "are we right to spend our lives lightly?"

"Nay," says she; "I can not think it wrong to employ the faculties that are given us for our enjoyment. You would not tear the wings from a butterfly because it is less laborious than the worm that creeps!" Then, turning her wondering eyes over that vast wilderness, she adds sadly, "Sure, these wilds are not for men to live in."

"The Ingas live in the midst of it," says I, pointing down into the valley.

"Then shame on those who have forced them to such an existence," says she, for I had told her how the Portugals had driven them from their cities. Then, with a tender sigh, "Poor souls!" says she, "*no wonder they never laugh*. The stillness of these mountains and the sadness of the woods have filled their hearts."

These words went home to my conscience; and just as a soap-bubble at the slightest touch will burst—its perfect shape and bright colors, that were a delight to the eye, disappearing in an instant, leaving naught behind but the drop of murky water from which it sprang—so did all those fine colorable hopes in which I had joyed for two whole days and nights vanish quite away at this prick, giving me to contemplate the selfish, paltry motive that gave 'em birth.

I took my lady in silence back to the tent, and, having bidden her good-night, I hied me again in great dejection to the rock, whence the valley looked now more gloomy and awesome than before, for the creeping darkness; and there sitting down I took myself plainly to task. For I did now plainly discern that I had been cheating and deceiving myself with false pretences, with a view to cheating and deceiving my dear Lady Biddy after. Why had I leapt so readily at Matthew's scheme? Not for the sake of the unhappy Ingas, but for my own delight; not because a generous emotion moved me to rescue them from the Portugals, but because of a base and selfish desire to keep Lady Biddy in the wilderness, sundered from her friends and companions by necessity; not to advance the welfare of others, but to stave off the inevitable moment when my lady and I must part forever. Nor could I excuse myself by pleading ignorance of any harmful intention, for surely I must have felt in my heart that this design was not to my lady's advantage, since I had not dared to mention one word of it to her. That in myself was enough to convict me of wickedness.

Looking down into the valley, which had now become a black, unfathomable gulf, I repeated Lady Biddy's words—"These wilds are not for men to live in"; and then again, "Would you tear the wings from a butterfly?" and after that, "Poor souls! no wonder they never laugh." And each phrase was a reproach that did stab my heart like an avenging knife; for I had in my wishes doomed her whom I loved to dwell in this gloom. I had meditated robbing her of all the cheerful delights of youth and liberty. I had planned to silence her merry laughter, and overcast that bright young face with the wan cast of grief and despair.

"Nay," says I, springing up, "I will stay not a day longer in these wilds than I can help. We will go hence. What matter how perilous and wearisome the way if she have hope to strengthen her heart? With God's help I will comfort her pillow every night with some prospect of better fortune on the morrow."

Just at that moment I heard in the woods below the cry of a bird that had often filled Sir Harry and me with amazement and delight (which bird I have since heard called by the Ingas *Arara*), and this put me in mind how I might dispel from my lady's mind those gloomy thoughts inspired by the sight of the valley; so coming to her tent I scratched gently on one of the mats to know if she were asleep, as I did use to do when we were imprisoned on the pirate ship.

"Is that you, Benet?" says she from within.

"Ay," says I! "if it be not too great trouble, do come hither and listen."

So presently she came out, and no sooner had she stood listening a minute, but she cries in a trembling voice:

"Oh, Benet, 'tis the bell of Falmouth church—hark!"

We stood quite silent again, and there came faintly to our ears, "Dong, dong—dong, dong—dong, dong!" to which we listened till it ceased and came no more.

"What is it, Benet?" says she, not louder than a whisper.

"'Tis but a bird," says I; "but I take it Providence has winged it hither for a promise and sign that ere long you shall hear Falmouth bells again."

"Oh! Benet, Benet," says she, choking with tears of joy, "how good you are!" and with that she pressed my hand and went back to her tent.

"God grant that I be worthier of such esteem," says I to myself in passion.

CHAPTER LIV.

WE PART COMPANY WITH OUR RIGHT GOOD FRIEND PENNYFARDEN, TO OUR COMMON SORROW.

In the morning I told Matthew that I had resolved to abandon my design of staying amongst the Ingas, which he assured me he was heartily glad to hear.

"For," says he, "the more you have praised the scheme and enlarged upon it, the more difficulties and dangers I have perceived, till, to tell you the truth, I have more than once wished myself at Gilkicker before I ever put such a notion into your head. For look you, master, a man may be thrown from his horse in a twinkling, but it takes him a plaguy long time to catch the steed and get up in the saddle again. Whereby, if these Ingas have been a matter of a century or two sinking into their present condition, we may safely argue that we should be pretty old before we restored them to their former estate. In the mean while, as it seems to be the fashion all the world over to cut your king's head off as soon as he grows tiresome, we should have stood in a fair way to go to the block whenever we ventured to improve the condition of our people. You will say that this is a trifling matter to a man under the sacred call of duty (though for my own part I'd as soon have my head cut off with a knife as die abed of a colic), yet it won't do to be carried away by our own views of pleasure: we must consider, as doubtless you have, that we have a female on our hands, and ought to avoid placing her in an awkward position."

I believe the fellow would have run on in this fashion half an hour; but, cutting him short, I bade him tell the Ingas at once of our decision, and this he presently did.

They heard him out patiently, but whether they were cast down or not by our refusal to join in their enterprise we could not judge, for they suffer themselves to betray no sentiment which may detract from their manhood, and count all expressions of joy and sorrow as a weakness only fit for women and children. And it seems they do in all things shape their conduct (as far as they may) in keeping with the carriage of their god, the Sun; for when Matthew told them we hoped our refusal would not hinder them from putting us on our way to reach the Baraquan, the chief replied that they had given their promise to do so, and would not go from their word.

"For," says he, lifting his hand, "does the Sun cease to complete his course because of a chilling cloud? He gets to his height, and the clouds part; he goes his way and looks back kindly on the golden streak which was an inky cloud. Should we be worthy children to disregard our father's teaching?"

"This is well for us," says Matthew, when he had translated this speech; "for if these fellows, instead of following their deity, were guided by their devil—as are nine-tenths of the rest of humanity—we should be in a pretty pickle."

We reached the Ingas' village about midday, which was naught but a barren piece of ground fenced about with stakes at a little distance from the river, and screened from observation by a thick growth of trees and bushes. Their nets hung between trees, and half a dozen canoes lay ready to be carried to the water. These, with a beggarly account of pots and vessels made of gourds, constituted all their belongings.

The men met each other with forced composure, the victors showing no sign of triumph, and those of the village none of envy, and yet it was clear to see as they handled the arquebuses, examined the stores carried by the mules, and regarded the captured slaves and ourselves, that they regarded this foray as no small matter. Until the men had done talking together, the women stood apart in silence, not daring to approach their lords before they were bidden; but it was touching to see how they stood there, taking no heed of us or of each other, but watching their men with eager, loving eyes, ready to dart forward at the first permitting signal.

"How do they justify this treatment of their women, Matthew?" says I. "The Sun shines on men and women alike; but here the poor souls are left in the shade."

"Their turn will come," says he; "and 'tis clear by the faces of the women that they are loved. As for justification, I have no doubt they will tell you that the Sun touches first the mountain-tops, and descends afterwards to the little hills; and for that matter—with all respect to your ladyship" (giving a scrape to Lady Biddy)—"I doubt if the females have any reason to complain; for I have observed that those who dwell in high places, though they get more observation and admiration than others do, have but a chilly time of it, while they who hold a moderate height enjoy an agreeable warmth. Hows'mever," says he, "let us leave 'em to themselves awhile, for I see they are going to hold a meeting, and we shall do well to lay our heads together likewise."

I had not left my Lady Biddy's side in descending the mountain, but Matthew had walked three parts of the way conversing with the Ingas, and for the fourth part had fallen behind us and walked in silence, whence I gathered there was something weighty on his mind. And so it presently appeared, for as soon as we were seated together on that part of the enclosure where the canoes lay, he began as follows:

"I have been questioning the Ingas, your ladyship, about getting down the Oronoque," says he, "and it seems to me a more hopeful business than when we first looked at it, thanks be to God. If I have not been quite so chatty as I used to be, and look a little bit chop-fallen at this present, I do beg you to believe it is not by reason of anything the Ingas have told me, but on

another account. When you reach the River Meta they will obtain a canoe from a friendly tribe that dwells there, and furnish you with store of things necessary to your journey; and also, by means of cut sticks, which pass among them for letters, they will give you the means of securing help from other tribes that you may meet with. And with their help I doubt not but you will come safe to the mouth of the Oronoque."

"But, Matthew," says I, "you speak as if you were not coming with us. Have you the heart to leave us after sharing our fortunes thus far?"

"Lord love you, master, no. I haven't the heart to leave you, and that's the fact," says he, with a wry face and a scratch of his head. "There's nothing in the world would please me better than to go this journey with you, for I do love you with all my soul. But the best things in this world are put here for us to look at and not to have, and we must put up with what we can get, and be grateful to Providence it's no worse. 'Tis in this way, your ladyship. At the mouth of the Oronoque you would be as badly off as you are here, if there was no one there to meet you; nay, worse, for here you have friends, and there you would stand a chance of finding naught but enemies, wherefore I design to go down this river to Cartagena, or elsewhere, as may be expedient, and thence go in quest of your uncle, that he may come up the Oronoque to meet you. 'Tis but a chance that I find him, to be sure; yet help of some kind I will bring to you by hook or by crook, I warrant, and certain am I that I may serve you better in this manner than in any other, or I could not screw up my courage to part."

"Nay," says Lady Biddy, "why should we part? Can not we all descend to Cartagena?"

"No, your ladyship," says he, with a rueful shake of his head. "Your face marks you out for observation; your speech would betray us, and we should be undone."

"But how can we consent to let you run a risk that we dare not encounter?" says she.

"Alone my risk is small," says he, "for, as Master Benet knows, I have a famous preservative against the touch of Portugals in certain berries that produce a distemper of my skin, which will serve my turn to a marvel at this season when pestilence is rife. I pray you, do not think of me, but only of yourself; or if your generous disposition will not suffer that, then think of your poor uncle and friends, to whom your absence must be torture, and so let me go my way with further discussion."

However, we could not thus suddenly agree to this project, and racked our invention to devise some better expedient; but there was none, and so were we forced at length to yield to his going, but with bitter regret, for we stood in need of a friend, and sure no man was ever a more cheerful, sensible, and devoted comrade than our poor Matthew.

When the time came for him to depart, the Ingas made him a handsome present of a canoe, stored with dried flesh (which they call *buccan*), cassavy bread, etc., besides one of the Portugal's swords and a good knife; and Lady Biddy gave him a little chain she wore about her neck as a token; but I had nothing to give him, save a paltry brass tobacco-box, which I had managed to keep through all my accidents; but I do think he was as well pleased to have this as if it had been a purse of a thousand crowns.

When he pushed off from the shore into the midst of the current he waved his hat and cried to us "Farewell" very cheerily, yet I knew by my own feeling that his heart was sore. And we cried to him "Farewell" as happily as we could, but I could not see him presently for the tears that came into my eyes. "As like as not," says I to myself, "we shall never meet again."

Then Lady Biddy, seeing my dejection, slips her hand through my arm in silence, to remind me that I had yet a friend; whereupon my heart leapt from despondency to joy, and I thought, "What matters it if all the world be lost so that this dear soul is left to me?" Yet I felt the more that night for poor Matthew, because he had no such comfort in the cheerless, lonely wilds.

CHAPTER LV.

WE GO DOWN THE META, MY DEAR LADY AND I—THE PLEASANTEST JAUNT HEART OF MAN COULD DESIRE.

We set out from the River Cauca with the whole tribe of those Ingas, the effects, and the captive women and spoil taken from the Portugals; for they were still minded to raise their people to carry war into the strong-holds of their enemies, and counted to bring other tribes to their intent by a display of their force, and the trophies of their victory. And so in a long line, with the ablest men to the fore spying the way, we traveled painfully through the desert wilds, crossing the River Magdalena by a tolerable ford, besides many mountains and valleys of prodigious proportions; for there is no country in the world where the mountains are so high and steep, and the valleys so deep and bushy, I do think; and how we made our way, yet keeping a fairly true course, is a mystery to me, for one half the time we never saw the sky for the umbrage of trees and the other half never a blade of grass for the stony barrenness of the rocks.

At the end of six weeks and three days we came to the great River Meta, which was as long again as the Ingas do usually take for that journey, by reason that in many places a way had to be hewn for the passage of the mules, where the Indians might readily have slipped through in their nakedness. However, though by this delay we lost in one respect we made profit by it in another; for not only did my Lady Biddy and I pick up enough of their words to make ourselves understood, which later on served us in good stead, but also we learnt great store of things, for want of which we might have been sorely pestered when we had no hands to help us but our own. Thus we learnt to make excellent bread from the root of the *cassavy*—which, made properly, is as good as any loaf of wheat flour, and yet for want of proper attention may poison you so that you die of it in an hour. Also they showed me how to make a canoe with the bark of a tree, sewn up at each end, and smeared over with the gum of *caoutchoucona*, a most admirable natural juice, which hardens quickly, and is as water-tight as any Sweden pitch. Likewise, to our great comfort, we were shown a sweet-smelling herb called *caccanowa*, from which issues a thin oil that no flies or insects can abide; so that by rubbing the skin therewith one may sleep all night and never once be bitten by any scorpion, moskitaw, or ant. And besides this we learnt their mode of kindling fire, which is ten times better than our fashion of striking flint and steel together; and this they do by making an engine of two pieces of cane like a child's popgun, only that the ends of these canes are open at one end and closed at the other. In the bottom of the bigger cane they put a store of powdered touchwood; then slipping in the smaller cane, which serves as a rammer, they give it a smart blow with the hand, and this sets fire to the tinder, though as how it passes my comprehension. In short, we picked up more knowledge of herbs, fruits, flowers, birds, beasts, and fishes, with the divers manners of rearing them, with properties of others things, their uses, etc., in those six weeks than I could describe fairly in six months, and so will I go back to my history.

Being come to the Meta, as I say, we made our way to the village of those Ingas who were friendly with ours, and there we were very well received. With them we stayed two days, during which time I showed them the use of the muskets taken from the Portugals, which I had not done before because of wasting the munitions, and in return they gave us as much information as they possessed with regard to descending the river, bidding us beware of certain falls which would certainly be our ruin unless we escaped them by drawing our boat through the woods from the upper river to the lower, and also counseling us to find a suitable shelter as soon as the rains threatened to fall; for they reckoned we could by no means hope to get down even to the Baraquan before the rainy season began.

Then they chose the largest and fittest canoe they had, and gave it us with a free heart; and in this, when we were ready to depart, they set (*imprimis*) an ample store of buccan and cassavy cakes; (2) vessels for cooking and drinking; (3) a Portugal sword and knife like those they gave to Matthew; (4) three good bows with strings to spare, a hundred arrows, and a small gourd of poison to envenom the points, which poison they do esteem and prize most highly; (5) a gourd of their tinder and two popguns, as I will call them for kindling it; (6) two wands, very curiously wrought with carving of figures, to serve as tokens to other tribes that we were their friends and enemies to all Portugals; (7) two sleeping-nets; (8) a packet of various things, such as medicines against fevers, bites of serpents, etc.; and (9) a couple of soft woven mats which these people do use for blankets. And now, when these good, kind folk had nothing more to give us for our use, they came, every man, woman, and child, and laid their hands on us as a sign of love, so that our hearts ached as we got into the canoe bidding them farewell, and the tears coursed down Lady Biddy's cheeks as she waved her hand to her little friend Wangapona, who, kneeling on the bank by the water-side, covered her face with her hands, as if she could no longer bear to watch one so dearly loved sliding down that river, away, away, never to return.

However, though I risk being deemed heartless, I must admit that this feeling of regret passed from my breast as soon as the bend of the river shut the Ingas from our perspective, and in its place sprang a sentiment of gladness and joy that I could scarce contain; for there before me sat my Lady Biddy, radiant with health and beauty, her eyes yet glittering with tears, but a gentle smile playing about her sweet cheek as hope revived her heart, and I knew that for many weeks—ay, months—we must live close together; that for long, long days every word of her dear lips must be for my ear, every smile for me, and for me only. My mind was too enchanted with the prospect of such happiness to dwell on the blank, dreadful misery that must follow when our journey came to an end, and she was restored to her friends. "Why should I plague myself," says I to myself, "with the future when the present is so lovely? If one is to weep to-morrow, there is more reason in smiling today." Yet, nevertheless, a wicked hope did secretly lie at the bottom of my heart that ere we reached our journey's end some sudden accident might put an end to both our lives.

'Twas like some pleasant summer holiday jaunt, for the river was broad and smooth, and the current just swift enough to carry us merrily onward, with no more than a stroke of the paddle now and then to keep the canoe to her course. On either hand were trees weighed down with strings of rubies and opals and amethysts, for so those twining wreaths of flowers seemed. In the pools stood wondrous herons; some saffron and rosy pink, and other some crimson red; but of the birds that started from the reeds, and those that flew over our heads, there was no end to the gorgeous tints.

About midday we became conscious of a most delicate sweet scent, and at a sudden turn of the river my dear lady clapped her hands and cried out in delight. Turning about whither her eyes were resting, I spied a wide, deep inlet of the river, where there was but slight movement of the water, all covered over with green lily leaves, dotted with blooms of creamy-white and tender pink, from which that delicate perfume issued. But how shall I tell, and yet be believed for a truthful man, of the wondrous size of these lilies? There was not a bloom that measured less than a yard about; and as for the leaves, I have seen no round table so big, for some of them did measure a good fathom and a half from side to side.

For some time we looked in amaze at this wondrous field of beauty, and then perceiving a part of that inlet very agreeably shaded with drooping palmettoes, I thought it would be a vastly proper place to rest in and eat our noon-day meal; and Lady Biddy being also of this opinion, I shoved the canoe in the midst of these lilies, where she was like to stay as secure as if chained to an anchor, and there we ate and drank, refreshing ourselves at the same time with the delights of this lily paradise.

When we had feasted to our heart's content, I pushed to the shore, and having tied one of the nets betwixt two trees, I begged my lady to repose till the heat of the day was passed.

"'Tis but changing one dream for another, Benet," says she, lying down in her net. So she lay facing the water and looking at the great moths that fluttered over the still flowers, with sweet content in her face, till her lids dropped, and she slept.

As soon as I perceived this I got up, for to gratify her wish I had made a pretense of sleeping on the herb at a little distance; and observing that this grass was exceeding fine and soft, I got my sword and mowed enough to make two good trusses, and these I took down to the canoe and bestowed them in the hinder end. Then pushing out amongst the lilies, I cut me two great leaves of like circumference, which I carried to the shore, and there laying them on the ground back to back, I made shift, with a long thorn for a needle and some stout palmetto fibre for thread, to sew them tightly together, so that it stood on edge very well by reason of the edges being curled up all round half a foot high, and one leaf supporting the other. Then this I took down to the canoe, and setting it up crosswise betwixt the two trusses of grass, and further securing it by means of threads from its circumference to the hinder end of the canoe, it kept its place as well as I could wish. By the time I had finished this business my Lady Biddy awoke, and coming down to where I stood looking at my handiwork, she says, "Why, what is that for, Benet?"

"To keep the sun from your back as we go down the river," says I, "and the sun out of my eyes."

"And the soft grass is a cushion for me to sit on," says she; "sure, no one in the world is so ingenious and thoughtful as you."

But I had another purpose in view for this screen, as I put in practice that night when we could go no further, and I anchored our canoe in a little shallow. While Lady Biddy was ashore to get some fruit she had a mind to, I set this lily-leaf screen midway in the length of the canoe, which was some twenty feet long, or thereabouts, dividing it, as you may say, into two chambers, each ten feet long, and duly screened one from another; and this screen I secured with strings, so that it could fall neither one way nor t'other. In the hinder half, which was not encumbered with our goods, I strewed one of the trusses of grass, and from the other I drew out a good soft armful that I set against the screen for a pillow.

When my lady came with a leaf full of fruit for our supper, I pointed to the provision I had made in the boat, and says I:

"There, my lady, is your bed-chamber" (indicating the hinder part), "and here is mine" (pointing to the fore part).

"That is famous," says she with a little blush. And I think she was the more content for having been troubled in her mind before as to this matter, as I judged from her silence. So when we had eaten our fruit, I stepped into the shallow, drew the boat hither, and helped my lady to step into her part. Then I pushed the boat out into the current, where she was anchored, and after pressing my lady's hand for a good-night, I stepped into my part of the boat and lay me down with a feeling of boundless joyful gratitude in my heart, such as I never felt there before. To think that she lay quite close to me, with naught but a lily-leaf betwixt her dear head and mine, was enough to distract my reason.

Though we had said good-night, Lady Biddy continued to chat some time, and from her cheerful, sprightly tone it was clear that she made her preparations for the night without fear; but, Lord, I do believe, had there been no screen betwixt us, she had been as secure from my observation, for I would have torn the eyes from my head rather than destroy the dainty image of virgin modesty that was hallowed in my breast.

CHAPTER LVI.

I AM PUT TO GREAT CONCERN ON ACCOUNT OF A PORTUGAL, WHICH PRESENTLY TAKES THE PRETTIEST TURN IMAGINABLE.

The next morning I awoke at daybreak, but lay very still for a good hour, not to disturb my dear lady; and this time was in nowise tedious, for my head was full of glee to think that here was another day of joy before me. And also my mind was well occupied in turning over the particulars of our existence, and devising means by which I might make the day agreeable to my lady as well as joyful to myself.

Among other things, I thought it would not be amiss if I went a-hunting in the woods for some fresh game to replace the buccan, which is at best but an indifferent dry kind of victuals. "Moreover," thinks I, "my absence will give Lady Biddy occasion to bathe her sweet body if she be so minded." Whereupon I cast off my mat, and stepping into the shallow, that I might not overmuch joggle the canoe about, I gave myself a sluice and dressed myself.

Presently my lady, awaking, calls to me to know if it were time to rise.

"Nay," says I, "there is no hurry, for I am going a-hunting in the woods and shall not return maybe for an hour."

"You are sure you will not be back before, Benet?" says she.

"As for that," says I, "I will not stir from the place if you are afraid to be alone."

"Nay," says she, with a little laugh, "I am not afraid of that."

"Then I shall assuredly not be back for an hour," says I. "And if you are disposed to bathe, you will find the water very fresh and proper. I see no danger now, but I do beg you, ere you step in the water, to look well about you that there be no water-serpents nor cockadrils nigh."

She promised me she would be very careful; and so with a bow and a dozen arrows away I went into the woods, as cheerful as you please. And there, after shooting at a bird with a beak as big as his body (which is called a *tucana*) and missing him, I had the good chance to spy a *tumandua*, which is a long-haired beast with a snout three parts of a yard long, that feeds on the ants of the earth, which he licks up with a prodigious long tongue, like any whip-thong. I killed him with my first arrow, and having taken the skin off I cut the best parts, packed them in a cool leaf, and left the rest behind. And now I looked about for a milk-tree such as I have spoken of, and having the good fortune to find one I gave it a couple of gashes and drew off as much as a quart of excellent good milk in a gourd I had bethought me to sling on to my waist-belt. And by the time this was done, and I had plucked some good fruits, I reckoned it was time to return to the river; so thither I made my way, stopping now and then to stuff my pockets with such dry husks of nuts as make a brisk fire, and culling a few flowers that I thought might refresh my dear lady's senses as she ate. In this manner I charged myself pretty well: with this under one arm, that under t'other, my pockets sticking out on either side, my bow on my back, and my hands full.

But I was like to let all these things drop from me when I came to that point of the woods whence I could see the canoe, for the boat lay there empty, and nowhere could I catch a glimpse of my lady. But, to my horror, I presently spied, through an opening in the wood to my right, a Portugal (as I accounted him by his dress), fitting an arrow to his bow. I caught sight of him but for a moment, for having fitted his arrow he stole forward stealthily, as if to take his quarry by surprise, and disappeared behind a thicket. Then, as I say, was I like to have dropped all I had for amazement and terror. And now in a moment it appeared to me that my lady, having caught sight of this enemy, had fled into the wood to find me, and that, hampered by the thick growth, she had been brought to a stand, whither this wicked Portugal was stealing upon her to take her life. Whereupon, casting everything to the ground, I rushed forward, hallooing with all my force.

"Turn, villain Portugal!" shouts I. "Here is your enemy!"

But ere I had run fifty paces I was stayed by a new amazement, for, coming to the edge of the thicket, I was brought face to face with what I had taken for a Portugal, and now found was none other than Lady Biddy herself, but arrayed in a Portugal's doublet and trunks like any boy.

Hearing my terrible shout, and then catching sight of me all dumbfounded with astonishment, she must needs fall into a merry laugh; but the next moment she hung her head, blushing up to the eyes, and her knees turned in together for shame to be seen in that dress.

However, coming to herself presently, and perceiving there was no need to be ashamed of that which is done with no ill-motive, she lifts up her head, though her cheek yet burned and her bright eyes twinkled, and tells me how she had begged these clothes (which had belonged to the stripling that was page, as I have told, to Lewis de Pino) of the Ingas for her own use. And now I remembered how, when she stepped first into the canoe, she carried with her a packet which she put carefully in one part of the canoe, where, as may be believed, I had left it untouched.

"I shall need my gown," says she, "when we get out of these wilds, and assuredly there would be little left of it if I tried to make my way through these woods wearing it. Now," adds she, "I need be no plague to you, Benet, when we have to leave the river, for I can pass as readily as you through the bushes and thickets. Nay, I wish to be independent, so far as my strength will allow, that you may not fear to leave me alone if there be occasion; and to that end I was practising with this bow, and I thought I was brave enough for anything till you frightened me out of my wits by shouting out so terribly." And therewith she fell to laughing again; but now she was more at her ease, perceiving that I did not regard her in any unbecoming manner.

"Your judgment is never at fault, cousin," says I; "and sure it is more fit you should travel in this sort than in a gown which you have no means to mend when it suffered by an unseemly rent. Also 'twill be a great comfort to me to know you will not be left helpless by any accident that may happen to me."

"We will not think of such misfortunes," says she; "but I am heartily glad you approve of what I have done; and now, to complete the improvement, do, prithee, cut my hair close with your knife."

"Nay," says I, "that I can not do; you know not how pretty it is."

"Perhaps I do," says she sadly, and yet with a certain depth of meaning that I did not then fathom; "and so do as I beg you; for I can not well do it myself, and I am still woman enough to dread the thought of its being cut away."

"What need is there to cut it at all?" says I deplorably.

"Why," says she, "'tis as like to catch in the briars as my skirts, and the vexation will be greater. Besides, 'tis out of character with my dress, and I wish to feel my head as free as my limbs are. See," says she, undoing the knot and letting it fall, "how unbecoming it is to a young fellow, and what a deal of trouble it may get me into."

Here again was a hint of her meaning, yet I could not catch it then for admiring of the long waving tresses that came down to her waist, and glittered like threads of spun silk, with the color of a chestnut just burst from its husk.

However, seeing she would take no denial, I screwed up courage to take off some of this beautiful adornment; but I would cut it no shorter than her shoulders, which I maintained was the length that pages do wear it. And I would not lose a single hair; but when the business was done I tied the long locks in a thick knot, tenderly and in silence, for my heart was sorrowing with the reflection that one day this would be all that I could have of her.

"You are not going to keep that, Benet?" says she, seeing what I was about.

"Ay," says I, "if you will let me." And then, not knowing any better excuse to make, I added, "It may serve very well for fish-lines if there be any angling to do."

Thereupon we fell to talking of fishing and hunting, as that were the main question (though, so far as I was concerned, it was a long way therefrom), and I took her to see what I had got us in the shape of provision; and, to our content, no mischief had happened to those things by casting them down so hurriedly, for they had fallen into a tuft of grass, and the gourd of milk was unspilt. So we set about making a fire and preparing our food, all with a light and cheerful heart, as if 'twas the most natural thing in the world for my lady to be figuring in the garb of a boy. But when she was occupied with the cooking of the tamandua, under the pretense of seeing that the canoe had not shifted, I withdrew a little out of sight, and having pressed my lips and cheek to the cold shining locks of her hair, I opened my doublet and slipped them into my breast, where I ever kept them thereafter.

And now, to make an end to this part of our history, I must say here that I think my dear lady had another and secret intent in putting on the boy's habit and cutting off her hair, which was that she might that way abate somewhat the passion of love that reigned in my heart, and was, despite my utmost endeavors to conceal it, yet visible to her eyes. She thought, as I believe, that by putting off the garb and character of her sex, I might come to regard her less as a woman, and more as a comrade of my own kind. It is not necessary to be a philosopher—it is enough to be a woman—to perceive that a man's tenderness does increase by the dependence of womankind upon his means and love; and 'twas for this reason she desired to undertake what I undertook, to overcome her weakness, and to stand alone, as one may say.

But my passion was proof against these devices. For I could trace no action of hers to its motive without increasing my admiration and delight in the contemplation of her fine disposition. Nay, the aspect of her mind did delight my soul, as much, I truly believe, as the sight of her dear person; and she could do nothing to conceal the one or disguise the other from my searching perception. "Lord!" thinks I, when I dare not look at her, "can there be another soul so beautiful in all the world?" And then, when her eyes were elsewhere and I could regard her unseen, I would mark the dainty outline of her brow and nose, and the short upper lip that did betray her delicacy, her rounded under lip that spoke of mirth, her full, round chin, in which was no sign of weak or wanton purpose; also (with joy) how her hair that I had cut so barbarous straight did begin to curl at the end, and would sit shining on her shoulder or flutter in the soft breeze lightly by her downy cheek, like a butterfly beside a peach-plum.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE RAINY SEASON SETS IN WITH A VENGEANCE, AND WE ARE PUT TO SORRY SHIFT TO KEEP FROM DROWNING.

For five weeks we traveled down that great river, and if I set about it I could give a good account of every day; for 'twas my pleasure when I lay down at night to review the incidents of the day, since every hour did yield some precious food for rumination. Assuredly there were accidents, mishaps, and perils in that journey (as notably an assault by hostile savages, which made us mindful to trust them not thereafter); but in overcoming these difficulties and helping each other, my dear lady and I were knit more closely together, seeing that we had fared but miserably alone; and trouble, I take it, is like salt, which of itself is an abomination, but mingled sparingly with one's daily bread does give it good savor, and serves as a zest to the appetite.

But not to weary the reader with a tedious detail of my happiness, I will cut this matter short, and come to that time when the rainy season set in, and I knew no comfort day or night for concern on my dear lady's account. And over this business I will not linger neither, for surely no one with a feeling heart will care to hear of my misery.

At first we counted that the rain would give over at the end of the day, and that we might yet go a little further before taking refuge for the season; but we soon found our mistake, for in these parts it does not rain in showers, but comes down cats and dogs, as you may say, for spitefulness, a whole month without ceasing. So when we perceived how matters stood, having not a dry thread on us, and no means to lie down but in a bath, we resolved to stop at the next convenient spot we came to. And coming at length to a part of the river where the waters spread out into a kind of lake, we spied, standing up out of it on its south side, a very fair high island, which I then made for, as we deemed it would be more proper to our purpose than elsewhere. And a very good sort of island we found it—about fifty acres in extent, well furnished with trees, and of a sandy soil; and we were well pleased to find abundance of holes in the higher part, which I knew at once for the burrows of acutis,^[4] which, boiled or roast, make as good a dish as any man could have. Here, having settled to make our dwelling on the highest part of the island, as being the best drained, we drew our canoe ashore, and hauled it up thither. I say we, for my lady did haul with all her strength bravely, for she shrank from no helpful service, and well she aided me, bless her good heart!

Then with a couple of lianes that had served us for mooring our boat, we made a shift to sling up our canoe bottom upwards between two trees about seven feet from the ground; and, this done, we went to the water-side and cut a fair stack of cane-reeds, that grew abundantly there, and with a good deal of labor carried them up to our canoe. And now we set about planting our canes the length of the canoe, but a good bit wider at the base, and inclining them in such sort that they joined at the top within the boat, so that no wet could enter that way; indeed, we set these canes so close together, and so thickly all round and about save a little opening at the leeward end for our door, that not a drop of rain came through anywhere. Thus by nightfall had we made for ourselves a very decent little cottage, which I divided in two by hanging my mat across midway of its length, in order that my lady should have a chamber to herself.

Miserable as our estate may appear to those who have never suffered adversity, and are frightened out of their wits if they be but caught in an April shower, we were, I protest, heartily well content with our shelter, taking mighty satisfaction to ourselves because no wet leaked through our walls; that the ground, by being sandy, absorbed the water, so that there was no mud or beastliness on our floor; that, though our clothes were sodden, yet we felt no discomfort of cold, etc. Nay, we even made merry in getting our supper, because we were nearly choked by our fire of damp nuts, which set us coughing like any sick of a phthisic. But the true reason of our cheerfulness was that we were each minded to make the best of a bad job for the sake of the other, and in that way looked over the defects in our condition in spying out its advantages; and sure I am that the less we study our personal happiness, the less we find to be discontented with in our lot.

When we had been here three weeks I began to grow uneasy, for in all this time the rain had not ceased to fall, I verily believe, half an hour, whereby the waters were swelled to such a prodigious extent that more than half our island was flooded (and that the steeper part), so that I foresaw we could stay there not above another week unless a change in the weather came about; but sign of change was there none, the rain pouring down as though it would never have done. Yet where on earth we were to go, or what to do for the best, I could no way imagine. For as our island lay under water, so did the land by the river-side. To pass afoot amidst the trees in quest of higher ground was not less impossible than to get thither with the canoe—the trees about there being as close together as nine-pins, and the water pretty nigh a couple of fathoms high amongst them.

At length, seeing my anxiety, Lady Biddy accused me of keeping a secret from her against the spirit of true friendship. Whereupon I told her of my fears, and the perplexity they threw me into.

"I did think you had this matter on your mind, Benet," says she, "and I own I have noticed the rising of the waters with mistrust. Indeed," adds she, "you and I are not alone in this apprehension."

"Why, who else is there here to heed such matters?" says I.

"Look," says she, pointing before her through the opening as we sat in our hut.

Casting my eyes as she directed, I noticed a troop of acutis with their heads to the ground and their ears cast back.

"They have been driven from their holes by the water," says she, "and are so subdued by fear that they have let me take them up in my arms."

"They know they are safe here; which we may take for our own assurance," says I.

"So I think," says she. "A change must come ere long. Indeed, the air feels different already."

And a change did come the very next night; but such as we had not bargained for. About midnight there broke over us the most terrific storm of thunder and lightning I ever knew, and with it the rain came down in such torrents that I thought the weight of it must burst the lianes and bring our shelter down about our ears. This continued all the night, and I could not sleep a wink for thinking that mayhap the end of the world was at hand, and we were to be drowned by a second flood, despite the rainbow.

About daybreak Lady Biddy called to me.

"Benet," says she, "here's one of those poor acutis crept right into my arms."

Upon that I sprang to my feet and went outside, fearing the worst. And there, in the half-light, the whole of the ground about me was alive with the poor acutis, all so numbed with the wet and terror that they had not the sense to move out of my way; nor did they even cry out when I trod upon them. I had not gone a score of paces when I felt the sand yielding beneath me, and caught sight of water amidst the trees.

"Cousin," says I, running back, "we must prepare to go at once."

"I am dressed, Benet," says she cheerfully; "what can I do?"

I could not at once reply for admiring of the helpful, ready character of that dear woman (thus revealed), but paused to gaze on her in wonder and love; however, this was no time for long delay, so we presently got all the things out of the hut and placed them ready to our hand; and then I unfastened the lianes that held up our canoe, and we had now but a short distance to haul it ere we reached the water. Then we stowed all our poor possessions in their place, and launched the canoe amidst the trees. When it lay fairly afloat I begged my lady to get in. But she hesitated, with a mournful look behind her.

"Benet," says she, "if it won't make your labor of rowing more difficult, I should like to take some of those poor dear conies away. 'Tis so pitiful to leave them here to die."

I helped her with a willing and ready heart to carry as many of the half-dead acutis to the canoe as we could take, and then we got in, and I pushed my way through the trees out into the stream.

CHAPTER LVIII.

WE FIND A HAVEN OF REST IN A WONDROUS LAKE; BUT ARE NIGH BEING SUCKED INTO A WHIRLPOOL.

We swiftly left the island behind us, for this lake (as I call it), which had been pretty still when we entered it, was now hurrying along with the force of any mill-stream. The water was orange-tawny with the mud and sand it had swept up in its course, and littered all over with great trees and bushes; and this wreck on it, with the desolation all around, and the vast extent and the mighty force of it, did strike us both with awe and a feeling of our littleness and helplessness, so that we could not speak for some time. However, we presently found some consolation in perceiving that the rain had ceased to fall, and that betwixt the black clouds was here and there a rift of blue, which was the first we had seen of the sky for six weeks or thereabouts; and with this we grew more cheery, and even the conies began to prick their ears and nibble of some herb we had torn up for them the last thing before putting off.

My attention was soon diverted from these trifles by more serious matters; for being carried to that end of the lake whence the waters issued in a narrow passage betwixt two high rocks as through the neck of a funnel, it was with the utmost ado I kept our canoe in mid-stream and clear of those bushes and trees which, as I have said, were scattered abroad, and here by the confluence of the flood we were brought into such close quarters that at every turn the canoe was threatened to be nipped in their embrace or swept into the midst of the wreck and lumber that ground painfully against the banks, where our frail bark (as I may truly call it) would in a moment have been crushed like a thing of paper, and we with it.

To make matters worse, the course of the river was impeded by sundry huge rocks standing up here and there, which threw the stream into violent convulsions of eddies and torrents that no force of man could resist, so that one minute we faced one way, and the next another, to our great confusion and imminent peril, for out of all this trouble of rocks, bushes, trees, dead carcasses of cuacuparas^[5] and the like, there was promise of a speedy end (by death) to all our troubles; and certain I am that but for the help of Providence we had never come out of these straits alive.

How long we were in this pickle, whether five minutes or five hours, I know not; but I take it few men are so plagued in eighty years. And not one instant of repose was there either for me or my dear lady (who throughout kept a cool head, and helped with one of the oars to stave off this or that floating thing as surely and stoutly as any man), for ere we were out of one danger we were into another, and destruction menacing us on all sides.

It seemed that our condition could be no worse than it was; but whilst I was laying this fool's flattery to my heart, for its encouragement, my Lady Biddy cries suddenly:

"Hark, Benet! What can that noise be?"

Then straining my ears, yet still battling with trees, rocks, etc., I caught the sound her finer ear had first detected, which was like the rushing of a great wind at a distance. This perplexed me greatly for a space, for there was but a little air stirring; but at length, growing more used to the sound, which increased every instant, I hit upon an explanation of it which struck despair into my soul.

"Lord help us!" says I, "'tis the cataract we were warned against by the Ingas."

"Oh, what is to be done?" says she.

"Nay," says I, dropping my oar, "there is nothing to do now but to perish, dear cousin."

But she was not minded to perish tamely thus; and seeing we were drifting upon a tree, deftly turned her oar to my side and pushed the canoe from it, to our immediate salvation. Thus put to shame for my cowardice, I picked up my oar and strove again vigorously to keep in clear water.

But now the roaring of that fall was grown to the loudness of thunder, and casting my eye that way I perceived a kind of cloud rising above the river, which was nothing but the vapor thrown off by the heat of this vast river in falling such a prodigious depth.

Hitherto we had striven only to keep to the middle of the river, but now I glanced to the side, for there only might we chance to escape being engulfed in the cataract; though only to be crushed amidst the tearing heaps of timber that swept the shores. To my astonishment, I saw nothing but steep rocks on either hand; for being entirely occupied in steering away from the floating masses on the river, I had taken no note of the changing character of the country we had entered. In that glance I perceived there was no escape by the sides; so that there seemed truly no way but to go down with the water into that terrible abyss.

And yet my spirits recoiled from such an end, being stirred up to a desperate antagonism by the frightful noise of the waters, that appeared to me like the impatient roaring of some great cage of famished lions awaiting their meal.

Lady Biddy glanced round her at the same moment, and I saw no look of hope in her face. In truth, she saw no escape, for now we were come within the cold vapors of the fall, that fell on us like an autumn mist; and so she turned her face to me, and

seeing naught but despair there, her face lit up with a gentle smile, and she held forth her hands for me to take. Her lips moved as I clasped her dear hand, and though I could hear never a sound from the thundering of the fall now close to our ears, I knew full well that those last words were, "God bless you, dear Benet!"

The thought that she must die, so beautiful and sweet, and still but in the budding season of her life, and that after enduring so much, and striving so bravely and heartily, did fire me with a very madness of revolt against Providence, which, as I wickedly conceived, had doomed this dear girl, against all reason, justice, and mercy, to death; so that with a furious cry I caught up my oar and struck it wildly against a rock upon which we were being carried.

The shock of this encounter bent the oar till it snapped, though it was made of the toughest wood that grows in those parts, but it saved us; for this lusty blow turned us about from the current that was to the left of these rocks into that which sped to the right, and whereas that to the left went not more than two fathoms off over that mighty fall, the right passed through an opening in this rocky shore which we had not hitherto perceived, and here were we safe—at least, from destruction in that frightful fall, thanks be to God. And here could I diverge likewise one moment from the course of my history to point out the heinous folly of those who abandon themselves to despair, under the conviction that Providence has decreed their destruction, which it were useless to struggle against; for in thus yielding they do more surely oppose the decree of Providence, which hath given us functions expressly to preserve ourselves.

And now, I saw, we were in a manner safe, for though the stream was swift and strong, much encumbered from wreckage torn from the banks, etc., and obstructed with rocks where the waters shot down with incredible force, carrying us into divers eddies and whirlpools below, yet were our ears unassailed by that fearful roar of torrents which had paralyzed us. And after a while being carried through that chain of hills we came in view of a great plain, flooded over as far as the eye could reach, so that it looked like nothing but a vast sea, which flood was naught but the overflow of the River Baraquan, poured through the passage by which we had escaped the great falls. Here was there no current except on the verge of the hills, and that running gently; and as these hills ran westward we kept our canoe in the stream, hoping that it would run again into the Baraquan at a safe distance below the falls, which seemed to me the more likely because it bore towards a gap in some reasonably high mountains hemming in the plain to the southwest.

After running about two hours, as I judge, at about a league and a half to the hour, and passing through this gap, though with such diminished speed that I had to use my oar, we came into a lake of still water, about a mile across, and shut in all around with a ragged wall of crystal or silver, I know not which—only this I will answer for, that when a ray of sunlight touched them for a minute the eye was blinded by the dazzling glister. On some parts this wall of rock rose flush from the water; but elsewhere there was a little sloping ground fairly well wooded, but so flooded with the water that had streamed into this basin from the Baraquan that some of the trees on the border rose not more than four fathoms above the surface.

Issue from that lake saw I none, save by the passage we had entered; but I did not concern myself greatly on this head then, my main anxiety being to find some refuge where we might repose, for the day was drawing to a close. Not a morsel of food has passed our lips for nigh on twenty-four hours; and what with our exertion, terror, and hunger we were spent and sick.

To this end I paddled the canoe towards those rocks which rose (as I have said) sheer from the water, and by good luck we came to a craggy part on the western side which led up to a deep cavern, which, to our great comfort, we found as dry as any barn. But that which contented me as well as anything in this cavern was a great bank of dry leaves in the further extremity, the product of countless years, borne hither by the winds, which in these parts do constantly blow from the east.

"Here," thinks I, with glee—"here shall my dear lady lie warm and dry at least this night."

However, before deciding this way we made a fire of dry leaves, to be sure there was no savage beast or venomous worm hiding in the cavities; but there was no sign of any live creature having been there before us, save birds, whereof were some empty nests in the crevices. So hither we transported the goods from our canoe, not forgetting those acutis we had brought with us; and having satisfied the cravings of nature with what broken victual we had (being more hungry than nice), we knelt down side by side with one accord, and rendered thanks to God for his mercy to us. Indeed, our hearts were full of gratitude and peace; so that when our lips had ceased to speak, our spirits were yet very still and meditative. Thus it came about that instead of setting to (as I intended) to make some sort of sleeping-chamber for my gentle lady, I sat down beside her on a little knoll, and through the mouth of our cavern we watched the pink light fade out of the pearly clouds in silence.

Before I could rouse myself to an active disposition my sweet little comrade, quite overcome by the fatigue of that long day, fell asleep where she sat. First her chin drooped upon her breast, and then inclining towards me, her shoulder rested against my side, whereupon, to give her support, I put my arm about her body, with no unholy intent, but reverently, as any father might encircle his child. Presently she raised her head with a deep-drawn breath, and all unconscious laid her face against my breast, and so fell again into a deep slumber, with the innocent calm of a little child. And, though her pretty head was so near that I might have touched it with my lips, I did not take advantage of her unconsciousness in this way (thanks be to God), nor in any other which would give me shame to remember, my heart being filled with an ecstasy of pure love, softened with a compassionate sorrow, that one of her sex and condition should be brought, by rude hardship and cruel fortune, to this pitiful estate.

When she gave signs of awakening, I made a feint of yawning and stretching my arms, and then jumping up I cried:

"Lord, cousin, I do believe we've been a-napping!"

"Why, where are we, Benet?" says she.

"That we will presently see," says I; and putting some leaves on the embers that yet glowed, I blew them up into a flame, and by this light in a twinkling I set up a mat with the oar and a half that were left us, and begged my lady to repose herself, if she would make a shift with that poor accommodation, for the night.

The next morning being tolerably fair we made a voyage around our lake, and though we examined the inlets and rocks closely we could discover no issue, save that (as I have said afore) by which we had come in, where the waters were still flowing in pretty freely. This perplexed us considerably, for besides the stream from the Baraquan there were constantly falling into the lake some half a dozen runnels from springs in the rocks; yet, as we could plainly see, the water had not risen in the night, but rather fallen away if anything. However, on taking a second turn round the lake, we were like to have had this mystery explained in a fashion that was more conclusive than agreeable; for coasting closer than heretofore by these rocks that rose sheer out of the water, we felt ourselves suddenly within the influence of a current, which drew us with incredible velocity towards a deep vortex of whirlpool, by which these waters were drawn into some subterraneous passage through the rocks, and 'twas only by employing our utmost strength and skill that we thrust our canoe out of the flow, and so (thanks be to God!) escaped being sucked into that horrid gulf.

When we were somewhat recovered of the disorder into which this late peril had thrown us, I pointed out to my lady that there appeared no way of escaping from our captivity but by the stream that had brought us thither. "For," says I, "'tis questionable if ever we can scale those steep and slippery rocks that surround us."

"And could we do so," says she, "we must go empty-handed, for sure we could never drag our canoe up there, nor any of those things that are necessary to us. Nor have we any assurance that we shall be better off on the other side of those rocks than on this."

"You are in the right of it," says I; "then there remains nothing for it but to get back into the Baraquan as best we may."

"Ay," says she, "but we must assuredly wait until the rainy season is past—which has but just begun—for 'twere madness to venture again into such dangers as we have by a miracle escaped."

On hearing this I turned aside, that she might not read in my face the exultation of joy that filled my heart. And so as I made no reply she said in a rallying tone:

"Are you very anxious to get rid of me, Benet?"

'Twas on my tongue to answer, "If I could make captivity endurable to you, I would never take you from these rocky confines"; but I kept these words to myself, though what reply I stammered in their place I can not recall to mind.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE RAINY SEASON COMES TO AN END, BUT BY MY DELAY WE ARE BALKED OF RETURNING INTO THE BARAQUAN.

Having decided to dwell on that lake for some months to come, we set about making our cavern habitable. First of all we shifted our acutis into a separate cave hard by our abode, where they were very well housed; and thither also we carried all the dry leaves and rubbish, that we might have our floor sweet and clean, and afford no harbor for insects or worms. Then I parted off a fair corner to serve as a chamber for my lady by setting up a hurdle which I made of suitable wands, bound together with lianes, and clothing it on both sides with palmetto leaves, overlapping each other and pinned to the hurdle with thorn-stickles. To get these materials I made several voyages in the canoe amongst the wooded slopes that were partly under water; and in these excursions I found a good store of cassavy, and many other things that would be useful to us. When I had finished this partition to my own satisfaction and my dear lady's admiration (for she missed no occasion to encourage me with her approval), I hung up her sleeping-net and set one of the mat coverlets, which I had taken care to dry, ready to her hand. I would have had her use the other as a carpet to her feet, for I could have slept without it as well as the Ingas do; but she would by no means hear of this, so that I was forced to forego the happiness of yielding it to her use.

And while I was about this business my dear comrade was not idle—no, not for one moment. For she herself made several expeditions in the canoe alone, getting herbs for her conies, who were so appreciative of her gentle interest that they came to eat from her hand, and did (after a while) sit of a row at the mouth of their cave straining their necks to catch sight of her coming; and storing up in that cave such nuts and sticks as would serve for fuel when dry. And admirable it was to see with what skill she navigated the canoe, and how resolute, bold, and masterful she showed herself in carrying out her purpose—no matter what. Yet I was heartily pleased when these journeys were done, for all the time of her absence I was in a flutter of fear, going every other minute to spy out from the cavern if I could see her, and counting upon mishaps that might come to her.

Amongst other things, she brought home certain heads of broom, with which she brushed the walls and floor, so that not a speck of dust was to be seen. And all the time we were thus working together she kept up a lively gossip with me, save when we had naught to talk about, and those intervals we filled up by singing together certain simple songs that Cornish children sing, so that we had not a dull hour all day, and were for the best part as merry as any grigs.

And lest any one should be disposed to think ill of her (as that she forgot the dignity of her birth and breeding, and the delicacy of her sex in wearing the garb of a boy, and laying her hand with light heart to rough toil), I would urge this—that, in my humble thinking, she did infinitely more to maintain her character for nobility and true womanhood in making the best of her position with this cheerful, helpful spirit, than if she had left all labor to me, and sat her down to bewail and bemoan the cruel usage of fortune. For a surety she did increase my respect thereby, and I know no man who would not hold her sex in greater veneration for the addition she made to its virtues.

I lay awake the best part of that night scheming improvements of our dwelling-place. "As my hurdle is such a success," says I to myself, "I will make another as soon as possible, and part off a corner for my own sleeping-place, which will be more seemly and becoming than lying here on the floor of our parlor like a tom cat. And while I am about it I may as well make a third to shut off that nook against the entrance, which will serve my lady very commodiously for a kitchen. And there might I set up a shelf for her vessels; and also with stones I can fashion a fire-place, with a back chimney to carry off the smoke. The flat stone there, if I can raise it up a bit, will answer very well as a dresser to grind cassavy upon; but I must hunt up some sort of slate to dry it upon over the fire, and likewise for baking the cakes when my lady has made them. More gourds I must get for certain, that my dear lady may ever have store of fresh water to her hand; and this I shall do well to fetch from one of the fountains ere she rises in the morning, that she may not have to ask for it or fetch it herself, which else she were like enough to do. It will not be amiss, neither, if I look about pretty soon for some convenient screened-off pool of sparkling water, where she may bathe freely. And now for our living-room, which will be square and neat when I have cut off the other two sides as I design, we must have some sort of table and benches. Polished oak have we none, but stones in plenty; and a fair stone set up straight and level must be our table; a stone also will serve me well enough for a seat, but my lady shall have a chair if it cost me a fortnight to make one. In the mean time she can't be left a-standing; so a stone she must have for the present, but I will make a mat of rushes to cover it, which I may do in an hour. And while I am cutting these rushes I may as well get enough over and above to strew the floor of her chamber, for I can not abide the idea of her tender feet encountering the cold, hard rock. As for her chair, I may fashion the frame with stout sticks of a proper kind, bound together with lianes crosswise, like the letter X, and it shall have a back and elbows if my ingenuity carry me such length, and the seat and back I may make of rushes woven together. If I can find rushes of divers colors to plait with a pleasing device, so much the better; and by working this secretly before she rises of a morning, I may give it to her as a surprise for a birthday gift next Monday se'nnight, which must needs give her pleasure, however poor be the merits of my workmanship." And being got upon this theme I could not get away from it, but continued to revolve this chair in my mind till I fell asleep.

I have no space to give an account of our life day by day, though I fain would—for who can tire of narrating the history of happy hours? And so briefly I must tell that I carried out all I designed that night I lay awake, and more besides, for every day discovered new necessities, and we begrudged no labor that ministered to our common comfort. When it was fine we went a-

hunting of waterfowl, of which there was abundance, and other times of game in those woods that lay high and dry; and herein did my lady show herself as deft and skillful as in all else to which she lent her hand, bringing down her quarry with an arrow as surely as ever I did, so that there was no lack of contentment on either side. And when the day was foul we stayed within our cavern—I fashioning arrows or such like, and Lady Biddy at her needle. I say her needle, for out of thorns we contrived to make things that answered this purpose; and for stuff she had the skins of animals, which she shaped, with incredible ingenuity, into excellent socks for our feet, in place of shoes, which were now pretty nigh worn out. Nor did we lack amusement for our leisure hours, for my admirable lady being an excellent player of checks, she taught me this game, marking our dining-table out in squares for a check-board, and using divers-shaped nuts, ground flat at one end, for men. Also I tried to devise an instrument of music in the shape of a dulcimer; but this I succeeded worse in than anything else, for we could get no agreeable notes out of it, nor any sound that was worthy to mate with my dear lady's voice. But it gave us amusement, for all that, and many a hearty laugh.

In this way the winter, as I must call it, though there was never a chilly day, passed away; and in those months there was not for me a single wretched hour, save when the thought forced itself upon me that it must come to an end. As suddenly as the rain had set in, it ceased, and every cloud vanished from the sky as if by enchantment. In twenty-four hours the water sank as many inches, and as many more in the next day. With the return of the sun the birds burst into song, hallooing and whistling from morn till night. Lady Biddy went quietly about her duties and said nothing; nor did I; yet all day long a voice seemed to be saying in my ears, "You must go, Benet—you must go!" Even when I slept, the same words were repeated in my dreams. Yet I could not have the courage to tell Lady Biddy our time had come. But on the third evening, as we were standing by the mouth of our cavern, that bird we had heard before in the mountains gave tongue to his strange call. And my lady, clasping her hands, cried:

"Falmouth bells!—Falmouth bells!"

"Yes," says I, touched by the plaintive joy in her voice, "they are calling us. We must go." So the next morning we rowed over to the gap in the mountains to see if the waters were suitable for our departure yet awhile; and there we found a great bar of refuse brought down by the winter flood and no water flowing into the lake; nor was there sufficient depth to float our canoe. This proved to me that we ought to have gone the moment I saw the water sinking, but for shame I dared not admit the truth.

"In a few days," says I, "the plain will be dry, and we shall be able to march well enough to the Baraquan."

"We must leave our canoe behind us, musn't we, Benet?" says my lady quietly.

"Ay, but what of that?" says I, shortly; "can not we make another?"

"Yes," says she; but not a word of reproach passed her lips, though she must have seen that I was to blame not to have started while there was yet water to float us back to the river. And so we returned to the cave without a word, for I was in a despicably bad temper, because I knew I was in fault for not going when my conscience bade me. This ill-humor possessed me all day, though frequently my lady essayed to return to our customary free and cordial understanding; only when night came and I lay awake I felt remorse and grief for my wicked delay in the first place, and my foolish perversity after. "Fool," says I to myself bitterly, "not content with robbing your dear lady of freedom, you have marred a day she would have rendered happy. It may be the last she will ever care to lighten for you."

I could not rest for the torment of my self-reproach. Getting out of my net I went softly in the dark to her kitchen, and passed my hand over the things she was wont to use.

"Here," says I to myself, touching her dresser—"here have we stood side by side grinding our cassavy, mirthful and light-hearted. Why were we so happy and content? Because I had none but good intent towards her; because she was confident in me. Will she ever have faith in me again, knowing I have let slip her chance to escape? Can we ever more be happy together?"

Before daybreak I rowed over to the gap, and thence as soon as it was light I perceived that vast plain green as far as the eye could reach with the young shoots of reeds, laid bare by the further sinking of the water; but for some distance round and about the gap and extending by the hill, where the water had flowed in from the Baraquan, was a great bed of yellow mud, neither firm enough for the foot nor liquid enough for the canoe. Seeing, therefore, that no escape was possible until this mud grew hard (if ever it should), I went back very desolate to the cavern. And there was our morning meal spread on fair fresh leaves, which Lady Biddy employed for a table-cloth, and that dear creature waiting to greet me with a cheerful bright countenance, as if she had naught to reproach me with, though I marked a shade of anxiety beneath her sweet smile.

I told her where I had been, and, putting as good a face on it as well I could, added that we must wait a few days for the ground to harden ere we started again upon our journey. "But," thinks I, "'twill never harden, for surely from those hills there must dribble streams that flow into the lake; and here must my dear patient lady linger another whole year." And with this reflection, despite all my efforts to seem easy and hopeful, I fell into a despondent mood.

CHAPTER LX.

WE TRY ANOTHER MEANS OF ESCAPE, WHEREBY WE ARE AS NEARLY UNDONE AS MAY BE.

Presently my little comrade (as I call her) got up from her chair, and seating herself beside me on my stone stool, laid her hand very tenderly on my arm, and says she gently:

"You will tell me what is amiss, Benet, won't you?"

Upon this I told her my trouble, and how I must blame myself night and day for not having started to get back into the Baraquan when the rains first gave over and the water began to sink.

"Why," says she, "'twas too late; for sure the water must have ceased to overflow from the great river before it ceased to flow into the lake, and, therefore, we must have found at the entrance to the Baraquan just such a deposit of impassable mud as lies at the entrance of the lake. Thus, had we started when your conscience very unwisely bade you, we should have been finely served, for there must we have stuck betwixt two barriers, neither able to go forward nor to get back. Nor do I see," adds she, "how we were to have mended matters, for it had been madness to start before the rains ceased, and 'twas too late when they had."

In this manner did she reason with me, to my ineffable comfort, for naught that she urged was less cogent than tenderly considerate. But what delighted me even more than getting this heavy load of responsibility taken from my shoulders was the evidence of her admirable judgment and good sense in this matter; for though her wealth of goodness beggared me indeed by comparison, I was better pleased a hundredfold to admire her wisdom and feeling than if I had suddenly discovered myself blessed with these excellent qualities.

"Cousin," says I, "the justice of your conclusions leaves me no ground for regrets, save that I had not previously consulted you in this business."

"Why," says she with a merry laugh, "that is a regret I would not remove, for it may prompt you not to leave your 'little comrade' at home in perplexity next time you go a-boating in the dark."

After that we went together day after day across the lake to examine the ground; but 'twas no better on the seventh day than on the first, but worse, for then we gave up all hope of the ground ever getting firm enough to traverse. As I feared, the springs and rills from the hills kept it continually moist, and the ground, being nothing but filthy ooze, gave no hold whatever to the foot, as I found to my cost, when I attempted it, sinking up to my middle ere I had gone two paces, and with the greatest difficulty getting back with no worse misfortune. In addition to this, as the sun grew in power, this slough began to fester and putrefy, throwing off stinking vapors that raised our gorge. But that which made this pestilent belt more abhorrent to my lady than all else was the prodigious number of great worms and hideous reptiles that came hither to writhe and wallow in the foul slime. So (as I say) at the end of a week we decided that no issue by that part was possible.

And now I began to cast my eye at the mountains that hemmed us in, for I was bent upon getting away, and would harbor no thought of staying there, however I might be tempted by inclination that way; and spying one part which looked more broken than any other, I begged my lady to let me go and see if it were any way passable. But she would not hear of my going alone, though willing enough to go anywhere if she might share the peril; so provided with a store of food for the day and a stout stick apiece, we started off early one morning to make the venture.

For the first few hours we got on well enough, by the help of our sticks and such shrubs as grew in the fissures and cracks; but when we reached that part where the mountain was less broken and no herbs grew, our troubles began; and to tell of all our difficulties—how we had to leap like goats in one part, and climb with hands and feet like cats in another; how we had to go back and try new ways time out of mind—would be tedious indeed; but, to cut this matter short, we came about three in the afternoon to where the mountain rose sheer up on one side, and lay in a great smooth flat table, inclining towards the lake, on the other, and there was no way to go forward but upon this sloping table. And here I would have my lady desist from further adventuring; "for," says I, "if our foot slip, naught can save us from sliding down this rock as down the roof of a house, and shooting ourselves a thousand feet on to the crags below."

"But our foot must not slip, Benet," says she. "And there is no more danger here than we have encountered before."

Still I hesitated, but she, thinking I was concerned only for her, urged me to go on; and I, on the other hand, considering that this was our last and only chance of escape, at length consented, only bargaining that she should give me her hand to hold.

"Ay," says she, "that will I willingly; for if you go I have no mind to stay behind."

"Nor I neither," says I. And so, recommending ourselves to Providence, we went forward with our hands locked together.

Now went we along in this sort without accident a hundred yards, maybe, and then to my horror (I being ahead, with my eyes fixed on the rock under my feet) I discovered that we had come to the end of that sloping rock, and that another step would have plunged me down a great yawning fissure that showed no bottom; all was black below.

"What is it, Benet?" says my lady, as I came to a stand, for she dared not take her eyes from the ground, lest she should be seized with a vertigo.

"We must go back," says I quietly; "there is an abyss beside me which we can not cross."

"Very well," says she after a moment's pause. "Tell me when you are ready."

"We will wait a minute till your strength comes back," says I, for I felt her fingers quivering, despite my close hold.

"Nay, let us go at once, lest my courage fail," says she faintly. "But have a care when you come to the little ledge: it is loose; I felt it slide under my foot."

"Let me change places, that I may go first," says I.

"No, no!" cries she in an agony, as I was about to move; "for Heaven's sake, do not venture down the slope to pass me—do not leave go of my hand."

"So be it," says I; "but do prythee await till you feel stouter of heart." And then I tried to restore her confidence by all the means I could; but indeed my own heart quailed within me. For to realize our terrible position, you must fancy yourself standing on the steep roof of the highest cathedral, with no parapet to arrest your fall, and one of the slates so loose that it may slip under your foot, no matter how carefully you step.

"Thank you, Benet," says my dear lady. "You have brought my courage back. Come, let us go."

So with that she begins that backward journey; but now, instead of looking to the rock under my own feet, I was casting my eyes to my dear lady's for that loose rock she had spoken of. Presently I caught sight of it—a great slab that lay on the slope, with no space behind for a footing, and too wide to step across. And seeing this I sought with an eager fury for some means of stopping our fall if this slab should slide under our feet, but I could spy nothing but a fissure behind the slab, into which I might by chance thrust my arm in falling.

Now scarcely had my eye made this out when my dear lady stepped on the slab, and, to my sickening horror, I perceived it tilt a little, being very nicely poised; and doubtless had I set my foot firmly upon it at that moment, our combined weight would have held it firm and stationary, as it had in passing over it before, until it was released of my weight. But this did not occur to my slow wit at the right time—nay, rather, seeing this movement, I held back, and would have drawn my lady away. This hesitation (and maybe a little jerk I gave in my terror to her hand) was fatal, for ere I could cry aloud to her the great slab slid, and my dear lady, in striving to keep her balance, lost her footing and fell; then seeing that I was like to be drawn down the slope myself, when nothing in the world could have saved us from sliding with the slab to perdition, I threw myself on my face, and, flinging aside my stick, thrust my arm down that rent in the rock of which I have made mention. Thus I lay sprawled on that steep incline, half the length of my left arm wedged in the fissure above my head, and my right hand linked to my Lady Biddy's as she lay prone upon the slab.

My sole thought was to hold my dear lady, and this was no slight matter, for the edge of the slab had caught in her waist-belt, so that for a moment she and that great mass of rock hung, as I may say, on my bent arm. In that moment the bone of my forearm snapped like a dry stick, and indeed I thought my muscles must be torn asunder also, so sharp and strong was the strain upon it; but, thanks be to God, my lady's belt bursting, the slab slid from beneath her, and so was I relieved of that prodigious weight.

We heard the slab screech as it grated down the slope; then followed an interval of silence, in which one might have counted a score, followed by a great crash as the rock fell upon the crags below, smiting my soul with awe to think how we had surely been hurled down with it to our utter destruction but for a mercy of Providence.

But my arm was powerless to draw myself up, and fearing the torment of it might take away my senses, so that I might let my lady's hand slip, I called to her.

"Cousin," says I, "are you hurt sorely?"

"No," replies she faintly, "only frightened, Benet."

"God be praised!" says I. "And so do, if you may, roll hither and climb up by my body to the rock above, for I have no strength left."

And this she did, but with great pain and trouble, for the dear soul trembled in every limb, and was faint from the shock. I helped her as well as I might with my right arm, yet could I do but little for my own sickness. However, she presently got strength from a source which never fails to invigorate such hearts as hers; for, coming as high as my shoulder, she cries:

"Dear Benet, your arm is broken"; and with that she quits my body and starts to her feet, which had she not dared to do under other conditions.

"Nay," says I, "take no heed of that, but do place your feet upon that crevice, which will give you a good hold."

"Ay, surely," says she, stepping up briskly. "Now may I help you, my poor Benet; give me your right hand, and have no fear. See how strong I am!"

Indeed, in helping me to my feet she proved herself as lusty as any man; and in getting from that horrid slope to a place of safety I owed more to her a hundredfold than she to me.

Of her readiness and tenderness in making a sling to bear my arm; of her gentle, encouraging words as she led the way down the rocks to our cavern, ever choosing the way most direct and least difficult for me; of her thoughtfulness in running forward to fetch me cool water from a spring to sup; of these things, I say, and many others, I have no words to speak, for no words that I know of can do her justice.

CHAPTER LXI.

I FALL INTO A DISMAL SICKNESS, AND RECOVER THEREOF.

When we were got into our cavern, my dear lady, of her own hand and wit, cut some strips of bark to serve as splints, and some of that grass which she used to shred for threads; then ripping up the sleeve of my doublet she, with her gentle, soft fingers, set the bone of my broken arm, and bound it up in the bark as ably and well as any clever surgeon could have served me. After that, seeing that the sweat of agony stood on my face, despite the joy it gave me to feel the touch of her sweet hand, and to note how admirably skillful she was in this business (as in all else), she would have me lie down awhile; and to this end she spread one of our mats on the floor of our living-room, that I might get the benefit of the air, and made up a pillow for my head with a bundle of soft herbs that we kept in store for the conies; and scarce had I laid my head down with a look and a little murmur to express my heartfelt gratitude (for I had no power to speak) when the things about me seemed to swim round and round, and I lost consciousness.

I lay in a foolish dream some time (though what absurdity was in my mind I cannot recall), and waking at length to my proper senses, the first thing I observed was that something cool and soft pressed my forehead, and looking up I perceived my little comrade kneeling beside me, with grave wistfulness in her deep eyes.

"What o'clock is it?" says I, like any fool.

"Nay, never mind about the hour, dear Benet," says she tenderly; and with that she shifts her hand, which was that I felt so gratefully cool on my forehead. But she shifted it only to set the other in its place, whereupon I sighed with comfort. Seeing I was pleased, she smiled sweetly, and says she:

"D'ye know me, Benet?"

"Ay, cousin," says I, "why should I not?"

"Tis three days since you last called me 'cousin.' Your mind has been wandering away from me."

"Is it possible?" says I.

"I feared you were going to leave me here alone for ever," says she, her voice trembling, and her eyes twinkling with a tear. "But you've come back to me after all," adds she with a faint laugh, and a little gulp as she turned aside to dash the tears away with her unoccupied hand.

"God be praised!" says I.

"Amen, amen, amen!" says she with passion. "And now do you taste of this broth I have made."

So I quickly made a shift to sit up, with her help, and eagerly emptied the gourd of the broth she had prepared; for not only was I prodigious hungry, but a stout determination seized me that I would overcome my weakness, and give this dear, dear companion no further anxiety.

"Give me some more if you have it, cousin," says I.

"To be sure I have more," says she. "What sort of a housewife should I be if my larder were empty when I expected company?"

Watching her narrowly as she hurried herself to refill the gourd, I observed, with a keen pang of sorrow, that her sweet face was thin and worn with care, albeit her fair countenance was overspread with a glow of happy contentment.

She bade me lie down again when I had emptied the second bowl of broth; and then, to please me, she brought her breakfast (for 'twas early morning), and ate it sitting on the ground beside me, which was her will and not mine. And when I asked her what had been amiss with me, she told me I had been light-headed, and would for ever be a-starting off to find my uncle Sir Bartlemy, though too weak to rise, and obedient to her hand, though I knew her not. "But," says she, "since yesterday morning you have had no strength even to speak, and I have heard no sound but—" She stopped, but I knew by the sound that rose from her tender bosom it was her own sobs she had heard. "But all that is past," says she cheerily; "and now you will soon be well again, and strong, won't you?"

"Ay," says I, "I promise you I'll be master of those mountains in a week."

"Benet," says she earnestly, "you must grant me a favor."

"With all my soul," says I.

"Then promise me you will never again essay to pass those terrible mountains. Promise!" says she. "And this also—that you will not approach that pestilent marsh, for I do think 'tis the fetid mists from the corruption there which has thrown you into this sickness."

"You ask too much of me," says I, "for how, but by one of these ways, can I hope to carry you hence? You have not reflected on that."

"Yes, I have," says she quietly. "I know that I am asking you to stay with me in the captivity to which our fortunes have brought us. Have we not sought by all the means in our power to escape? If Providence willed us to go hence, should we be thus cruelly rebuffed? Is it not better, Benet, to live here together than to perish singly? Oh, I cannot bear the thought of that. To be left alone—no one to speak to—no voice to cheer me! Have we been unhappy? Can we ever be without comfort, striving each to make the other happy? We may yet improve our cabin: the summer is at hand."

"Say not another word," says I; "I ask no more than to continue as we have lived." Indeed, I was like to have become light-headed again with the prospect revealed to me and the overflow of joy in my heart; and this tumult of emotion threw me back again, not yet being quit of my fever, so that I lay down exhausted in a kind of lethargy, from which I could not arouse myself even to taste the food from my dear lady's hand, which she has prepared for me. Nay, towards evening I felt as if my last hour had come for weakness, and when she, kneeling by my side, laid her sweet, cool hand upon my head as before, asking me how I did, 'twas with much ado I could open my eyes to reply by a look that I was very easy in my mind, as indeed I was, suffering no sort of pain, but only a very sweet dreaminess to think she was to be my companion always. So I lay with my drowsiness growing on me, never moving a hand-stir till the moon rose and shone upon me through the mouth of the cavern, where doubtless I looked like one dead, as I think, for my dear lady, still kneeling beside me, began to weep softly, which, though I heard it, I could find no check by any hopeful sign, because of my heaviness. Then, taking my hand and bending low, she murmurs with a broken voice, and such disconsolate tones as were enough to move the heart of the dead:

"You won't leave me, Benet dear—you won't leave me!"

And at that I managed to open my eyes and say "No"; therewith making bold to lift her hand a little. Then she, seeing what I would be at, aided me, so that I laid her lovely hand on my mouth and kissed it.

So, animated with a new vigor, and a sturdy determination that I would not yield to this faintness, but would master it for her sake, I contrived to ask her if she would make me a potion of those herbs the Ingas had given us, which I thought would do me good.

"I have it here ready," says she, "if you can but raise your head to drink of it. Wait; let me slip my arm under your head and around your neck—so."

In this tender fashion she helped me to rise, and set the gourd to my lips, from which I drank the brew to the bottom, which was as good as any apothecaries' drugs, and full as bitter.

This potion, together with my persevering resolution, did me a world of good, so that in a couple of hours I felt strong enough to get up on my feet, if needs be; perceiving which, my lady acceded to my entreaty, and laid herself down to take some repose, which she needed sorely, for I doubt if she had closed an eye all through my sickness. For my own part, I had no longer inclination to sleep, but lay devising means for improving our cavern as my lady had suggested, for one thing resolving I would try to make a partition to my lady's chamber that would let in the light, and yet secure her privacy, which I proposed to do with a sash of canes stretched over with bladder-skin; "and thereon," thinks I, "may she paint some pretty devices with such juice-stains as we can get, that it may have all the pleasant gay look of a painted glass window."

'Twas a great pleasure to me devising all this, but the telling of it the next morning to my lady was yet greater joy, for the delight she showed in the scheme. She brought her chair up, and sitting beside me listened with sparkling eyes a whole hour to all I had to say on this trumpery; but no matter seemed paltry to her which interested me, and I do believe she would have given her serious thought to discourse on a fiddlestick's end if my mind had been bent that way, so entire was her sympathy.

"Benet," says she in the end, "I do think there is no man in the world so ingenious as you in the service of a friend, nor so unselfish neither. For while you thought I wished to quit this place, naught could exhaust your patience in seeking the means; and now that you find I would stay, your first moments of consciousness are devoted to making my life here agreeable. Nay, it seems to me that you have overcome your sickness because you saw that my happiness, my very life, depended on it."

"Why, so I have," said I; and therewith I told her how that I had taken that resolution to live when I felt myself sinking into the heaviness of death.

She looked at me with kind, wondering eyes as I spoke, and for some moments sat in silence, her hands folded on her knees, and bending towards me. Then says she, "Oh! Benet, if we all strove to live for our friends as readily as we offer to die for them, how much more should we merit their love!"

Soon after this she took her bow and arrows and went off in the canoe to seek food for our supper in the wooded slope; but the dear girl did so steer her course that I might as long as possible see her from where I lay by the mouth of the cavern.

CHAPTER LXII.

I AM PUT TO GREAT TORMENT BY MY PASSION.

As soon as I was strong enough to get about, I went daily with my lady into the woods a-hunting; but as yet my left arm was useless, though getting strong apace, so that I could but play the part of squire to her. But, Lord! to see how dexterous she was with the bow, did give me more pride and pleasure than any of my own prowess. Yet from the tenderness of her love for all living things she was averse from this practice, which we men regard as an amusing pastime, and therefore would she kill nothing but that which was necessary to our existence.

I remember one day, when she had drawn her bow to shoot a dove that sat pluming its wings on a bough, she relaxed the string and returned the arrow to her sheaf.

"'Tis a fine fat pigeon," says I, "and we have naught for our supper: why have you spared it?"

"Do you not see her mate in the bough above?" says she. And so we supped on fruit and cassavy that night; but with no regret.

However, if there were moments of pain in these expeditions, there were long hours of delight; for now the woods were as like to Paradise as the mind of man can conceive, nothing lacking to enchant the senses; and to speak of all the rare and beautiful flowers and fruits we carried home to garnish our cavern would be an endless undertaking. And as these woods, valleys, and purling streams were like Paradise, so was I like a blessed soul therein; and I doubt if many men in all their lives sum up so much pure joy as every minute yielded to me. Here, day after day, I strolled beside my dear lady in the shade of delicate flowers, enveloped in sweet odors, and with warbling birds around us. But to my senses the sweetest music was her voice, the daintiest bloom her cheek, the most intoxicating perfume her breath. Looking around, it seemed to me that all Nature did but reflect her beauty, and therein lay its perfection. There were favorite spots where we would rest, noting the development of familiar things—how these buds expanded, how that fruit ripened, how the young birds began to stretch their naked necks beyond the nest's edge, crying for food; indeed, there was such scope for observation, and my dear lady was so quick to perceive and appreciate all things of beauty, that no moment was dull or tame.

While we indulged to the full our love for rambling, we were not unmindful of domestic things. The season was now come for plucking silk grass, and of this we cut an abundance, and laid it on the rocks to dry; for my lady designed to plait it, in the Ingas' style, into a long strip, which she might make up into clothing by-and-by. This plaiting was the first work I put my hand to, and though I bungled sadly over it to begin with, I grew defter in time, so that I could do it as well in the dark as in the day. Many an evening we sat weaving our grass hour after hour, with no light but that of the stars as they twinkled forth, chatting the whole while of other matters. But before I got to this proficiency—indeed, as soon as I could plait decently—I made a hat for my lady; not so much like a woman's as a boy's, that it might go fairly with her habit; and this, with a couple of bright tail-feathers from a macucagui^[6] stuck in jauntily o' one side, became her mightily, though I say it; but, for that matter, anything looked well that she took for her use.

About this time we had the good fortune to catch a partlet sitting on a nest of fifteen eggs; taking these home without delay, we clapped the eggs in a corner of our conies' cavern, where the hen, after some little ado, sat down upon them, being hemmed in with the hurdle that parted off my bed-chamber from our parlor, which I fetched out for that purpose.

About a fortnight later my Lady Biddy came to me in great glee one morning to say that every one of the eggs were hatched out; and I know not which looked the more content, this old hen strutting carefully amidst her chicks as proud as a peacock, or my dear lady casting some cassavy pap before them for a meal.

And now the conies multiplying prodigiously, that cavern was full of young live things, so that there was as much work to provide for their mouths as our own; but there was never too much for my lady to do, and she would not part with a single one.

"They are my children," she would say, with a little sadness in her smile.

With these innocent pleasures and hard work my lady beguiled the days, and so two months passed away—two months, as I say, of inexpressible delight for me. Not a day passed without my discovering some new charm in her person, some fresh grace in her character, which I had previously overlooked. And how to keep this adoration that filled my soul from overflowing by my lips, or my eyes, was almost more than I could compass.

One day when I was culling a nosegay, and seeing in the pale pink and cream hue of the flowers resemblance to my lady's cheek, I (being then alone) did with extravagant passion bury my face in the fresh cool bloom, kissing them till my transport was spent. Then, looking again at the blossoms, I was sobered to perceive how I had crushed out their freshness and beauty, so that they no longer bore any likeness to my dear lady's face.

So then I resolved I would not suffer myself to fall in love with her; but that was easier said than done. For 'twere as easy to promise you would not grow hungered or athirst. However, one thing was possible, if I had any manhood, and that was to keep my love from being known to my dear lady.

Nevertheless, before long I had reason to believe she had guessed my secret, for she also grew silent and downcast beyond her wont, and more than once I spied her looking at me with pity and sorrow, as if she knew of my trouble.

One day, when I addressed her as "my lady," she said:

"Why should you call me by a title here where there is no distinction? Why not call me 'sister,' Benet, or plain 'Biddy'?—for we are as brother and sister to one another, are we not, and must ever be?"

This hint showed what was in her mind; and yet if she had learnt my secret, God knows it was against the best I could do to hide it.

I called her "sister" after that, hoping it would train my mind to think of her in that relation; but it did not, so that I knew not what remedy to get for the fever of my heart.

One morning we were made merry at breakfast by the partlet making her way over the rocks that divided us from the conies' cave, and bringing all her brood to pay us a visit, which was as much as ever she could tempt them to undertake, and called for prodigious chuckling and scratching on her part. Our diversion somewhat relaxed the feeling of restraint within me, and when my dear lady, taking up a chick in her fair hands, held it up that I might see how bright and free were its eyes, I, looking all the while upon the lovely girl's head that was so near me, was within an ace of bending down to touch it with my lips. Now this being a Tuesday was the day for grinding our cassavy meal, and perceiving by my heat that I dare not trust myself to stand by our bench all the morning beside my lady, I made believe I had a relish for fish that day, and begged her to take her rod and line and go a-fishing while I ground the cassavy.

"Nay," says she, "do you go a-fishing, for your arm is not yet strong enough to do this hard work alone."

But I protested I was able to do this, my arm being as well as ever it had been, and that she was a better angler than I (as indeed was true), and so she presently took her rod and went over the rocks to a pool where fish abounded. When I had ground my meal and set the kitchen neatly in order, I betook myself to the rocks straightway; for I could never abide to let my lady be long out of sight for fear of accident befalling her. And that I might not scare the fish, I approached the pool noiselessly; but turning a rock that screened that part from view I was brought of a sudden to a stand by spying my poor little comrade sitting on a big stone, her rod lying idly beside her, her elbows on her knees, and her face buried in her hands. She made no sound, but I could see, by the twitching of her shoulders, that she was sobbing. Then would I have given all the world to be able to go thither and comfort her—to draw her to me and soothe her as a brother might his sister. But reflecting that we were but brother and sister in name, and that I should but add to her distress by my endeavors to assuage it, I drew back as silently as I had come, and going back to the cavern I sank down on my stone stool as wretched and sore at heart as might be.

"Poor soul," thinks I, "she must needs weep at times to relieve her overcharged heart. There are birds that do pine away in captivity. This is no home for her. These chicks and conies can never replace the friends she has lost and can never hope to rejoin. Here there is naught to hope for; even Nature must cease to charm her when she sees that these mountains and waters serve as the bars of a cage. What cheerful word can I whisper? What can I do to bring joy into those dear eyes?"

In this sort did I spend the time till I heard her voice feigning to hum a merry ditty, when I also put on a careless look to hide my care.

She had caught half a dozen fishes, so that she could not have given way long to grief; nor was it in her nature to yield to useless regrets. If I had judged only by her present manner I should have said that nothing was amiss with her, for she persevered in sprightly conversation, albeit I could join in it but poorly; still, as we sat to our dinner, I noted that the lids of her pretty eyes were swollen and red. Also I observed that her cheek was thinner than it used to be, and the blue veins in the back of her hand more clearly marked. Then it struck me that perhaps her dejection arose from failing health, and that the vapors from the fens, wafting over the lake, had already attacked her, as they had before seized me.

Then of a sudden the thought came to me as I looked at her—

"What should I do without my dear little comrade?"

And at this reflection it seemed as if the food I was eating must choke me.

God knows how I got through that meal. When it was over, I made a pretense of feeding the conies to go apart where I might give vent to the terrible emotion that brought me to a despairing grief. And saying again, "What should I do without her?" I wept like any child, but with the difficulty of a man, so that I felt as if my heart was being torn out of my breast, and beat my foot upon the ground in agony.

However, this weakness passed away with my tears, and then bracing myself up with more manly fortitude I swore, betwixt my clenched teeth, that all the powers of Nature should not keep my lady prisoner there. As I said this, my eye fell upon a mark on the rock, left by the turbid swollen waters, and marking how the waters were now fallen from this height a good five fathoms, I conceived a means of escape which had never before occurred to me.

CHAPTER LXIII.

WE ENTER INTO A CAVERN, THE LIKE OF WHICH NO MAN HAS EVER YET TOLD OF.

No sooner did this new idea come to me than I sprang down the rocks to where our canoe lay, stepped into it, pulled up the stone which served as an anchor, and, in a perfect rage of haste, paddled to that part of the lake where, as I have told, we were like to have been drawn down with the whirlpool.

To this region we had found no occasion to go since our first hazardous voyage thither, there being no woods, but only the high stony mountain. But now, nearing this part, I perceived, with a tumult of joy, a wide cavern in the rock, disclosed by the falling of the water from its previous height: moreover, there was no longer any whirlpool there, but only a gentle current flowing into the cavern, which was the natural efflux of the streams that came down from the mountains. And it can be readily understood that when the waters were swollen so prodigiously as to lie some depth above this cavern, there should be that vast eddy as they were sucked down to find vent by this passage.

Without fear I pushed my canoe to the very edge of the cavern and looked within; and, though the pitchy darkness of it was frightful enough, yet I was comforted by hearing no great noise of tumbling water, nor even the faintest echo, save of a little ripple, which convinced me that I might safely venture therein, with the assurance that I should come to no horrid falls, but reach, in due course, the issue of this stream upon the other side of the mountain. But I could go no further at this time for my impatience to carry comfort to my dear lady. So back I went with as much speed as I had come, and, seeing my dear lady standing at the cavern-mouth, I cried out with all my force for joy. Then, coming all breathless to where she stood in amaze, I essayed to tell her; but for some moments could utter no comprehensible words.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Benet?" says she.

"My little comrade," gasps I, "you shall weep no more. Your cheek shall grow full and rosy again. I have found the means to get from this accursed venomous prison!"

Lady Biddy looked at me in mute amazement, my feverish excitement giving her good reason to doubt whether I was not bereft of my reason; but, to cut the matter short, for 'twas ever to me an easier matter to act than to talk, I begged her to step into our canoe, that I might show her my discovery. This she did without further ado, whereupon I pushed across the lake till we came to the newly-found cavern, and there cast out our anchor of stone, that we might examine the entrance at our ease.

"There," says I, pointing into the grotto—"there lies our road to liberty!"

She peered into the darkness some time in silence, and then, with a hushed voice—

"I see no glimmer of light, Benet," says she.

"Nay," says I, "doubtless the tunnel reaches far and has many windings ere it disembogues beyond the further side of these mountains; but assuredly it has an issue, and I conclude the passage must be sufficiently commodious, since it gives no echo of break or fall, and has sufficed to carry off the vast body of waters so speedily, for you must remember how suddenly the lake fell after the flood ceased to rush in from the Baraquan. I believe you have nothing to dread here."

"I am ever ready," says she, "to put my life in your hands; but have you no fear for yourself?"

"I value my life only as it may serve you," says I with a transport.

On that, with a sudden impulse, she stretched out both hands to me, while her eyes were flushed with a tear of joy. As quickly I seized them in mine, pressing them as I had not hitherto dared. She did not try to draw them away, but smiled, while a single tear coursed down her cheek; and if I had drawn her to my breast that moment, I think she would have made no resistance, so virginal innocent was her heart, and pure from any feeling but that of responsive affection.

We lost no time in beginning our preparations for departure, and that evening we made up into cakes for next day's baking all the cassavy meal I had ground in the morning for our week's consumption. I was up at daylight the next morning, and, having made a good fire on the kitchen hearth, killed and dressed four acutis and a couple of chickens, for there was no knowing how long we might go before we again got fresh supplies. By this time, my lady having come back from her morning bath all fresh and bright as any pink after a summer shower, we sat down to our breakfast very merry and hopeful, discoursing all the while on the business before us. After that she set to a-baking of our cakes on the hearth and roasting meat at another fire, so that one would have thought we expected to entertain friends, and were preparing a banquet for them. While this was about, I went into the wood to cut some poles for guiding us through the cavern, and also I got me some good canes, with which I proposed to fence about our canoe, that we might be fended from sudden encounter with sharp rocks. In addition I gathered a good store of fresh fruit, and a quantity of cuati nuts on their branches, which the Ingas use for lamps, etc., than which no candles of wax give better light with less smoke.

All these things I carried back to the cavern by the time the sun had reached the meridian, and there I found dinner spread on our table, and no more sign of disorder than on any other day, my Lady Biddy being one of those excellent rare women, who,

no matter how busy they be, keep a clear head, and neglect none of those comforting attentions on which domestic happiness so much depends.

The rest of that day I spent in strengthening and defending our canoe (our fate depending thereon as much as anything), while my lady packed up those things we were to carry with us; and many a time she came to me in distress to know if we could not take this, or if we must leave that or t'other, for I had bid her take no more than was needful to us.

"The truth is," says she, when I went to her once, "I have not the heart to leave anything behind; for I cannot touch a thing but that it reminds me of the pleasure you have given me in making it for my use." Then after a pause, in which she looks around her, "Oh! Benet," adds she, "I never realized till now how happy we have been here; so I must needs feel sad in leaving these tokens behind."

The next morning we packed our effects in the canoe, and this being done, we carried my lady's pets from the conies' cave (as I call it) to the wood, and there set them free; but, Lord, to see these dumb things at the water's edge (the conies on their hind-legs), looking after their mistress, as if they had a notion they should never see her again, touched our hearts with sad regret.

"Farewell, you dears!" says my lady tearfully; and then, as we glided past our cavern, "Farewell, little home!" but she could say no more.

So in silence we neared that cavern where we were about to venture our lives; for I now perceived how serious and grave a business lay before me.

Before entering the grotto, I lit one of the cuati-nuts, and stuck it in a fork of green hard wood I had fixed to the prow of the canoe for that purpose. Then, my lady having a pole out on one side, and I one on the other, we recommended ourselves to Providence, and pushed into the darkness.

For some time we went gently down with the current, only using our poles to keep us head foremost, and as nigh the middle of the stream as we could judge. And here it was admirable to see how the rocks on either hand and above flashed back the light from our flaming nuts, for all the world like cut diamonds; but after a while, upon looking back, the opening of this cavern (through which we had come) looked no bigger than the flame of a penny candle, and the glitter of the rocks grew less perceptible, from which we concluded that the grotto, instead of diminishing, was increasing in capacity. At first this was no matter of regret, but rather the contrary; but by-and-by, when we could descry no light at all behind us, nor any reflection from the rocks around, a strange feeling crept upon me, for which I can find no name. Save the reflection of the burning nut upon the black water, and our own figures as we stood up in the canoe (which were shadowy enough for creatures of another world), we could see nothing. The water under the fire lay as still and smooth as any polished mirror; for aught we could tell, the current had ceased to flow, and we had come to a standstill. I thrust my pole out on either side; it touched nothing. I slid it downwards into the water, and my arm also up to the elbow, without striking the bottom. Then I struck upward as far as I could reach, without meeting any resistance. And on this I looked in my lady's face, and saw it white as a ghost's, and full of awe.

"We seem to have drifted into the world of nothing," says I sportively.

She lifts up her finger in silence a moment, and then in a whisper says she:

"There is no echo."

This indeed impressed me, more deeply than all the rest, with a sense of that vastness and obscurity in which we stood; and I could not speak, for fear of I know not what. And then, as we stood in that wondrous silence, there came a hollow voice from the immensity above, echoing my words after all this interval, but in such a hollow, muffled sound as you may hear after dropping a stone into a deep well.

"Are we moving, Benet?" says my lady, drawing a little nearer to me.

But I could not say whether we were or not, nor knew I any device to ascertain the truth.

I made my lady sit down, seeing she was much terrified by this strange experience, and replenished the fire at the prow; for though this light was of no service for our guidance, yet I felt that to be without it would be terrible, in good sooth.

So we waited, gazing about us for some sign of change (with the hope we were yet moving with a current whose now was too even for perception), until I guessed by my feelings it must be getting on for noon. Then, with what spirit I could muster, I proposed we should eat our dinner. But a more ghostly meal I never ate in my life; for all seemed so unreal that it was difficult to believe in our own existence almost. Nay, it crossed my mind that, for aught we knew to the contrary, we were now in some limbo of a future state.

"I do not think we are moving, Benet," says my lady, when our meal was at an end; "shall we not use our oars?"

"With all my heart," says I; "but as to steering, we must leave that to Providence." Indeed, I should long before have brought our oars into play but for the uncertainty as to whither we might come. For 'twas as likely as not we should pull in the wrong direction, having nothing for our guidance, and so, getting out of the current (if current there were), come into some stagnant part of those waters, where we might paddle about forever and a day and find no exit; but of this I said nothing, lest I should inspire my lady with more terrors than she had already.

And so we rowed on, from time to time replenishing our fire, and my heart sickening at the thought that we might be pushing into the depths of a boundless space, and away from all hope of deliverance. We had food for a week; but I doubted our fire-nuts would hold out three days. And when they were all spent, we must row in endless night, neither seeing each other nor any faintest glimmer, and that only till our food was spent. At this I did fervently pray for mercy—if it were only to catch sight again of the mouth by which we had entered—that we might get back once more into the light of day. My poor little comrade was thinking at this time of the sunlight and her conies, with a longing to be back in our deserted cavern, as she told me.

We rowed till our strength was exhausted; then I bade my lady lie down and rest, while I watched and kept the nuts burning. When she had taken her slumbers, she insisted upon my doing likewise, and with some reluctance I, in my turn, lay down and fell asleep.

I awoke, and then seeing nothing whatever, for the light was no longer burning, I cried out with a terrible fear that my lady was no more.

But her sweet voice brought me quick relief, as she told me that she had thought it best to economize our fuel. "And, Benet," says she, "are we not more likely to catch sight of a faint light in the distance if we have no fire here to dazzle our eyes?"

"Why, there you are in the right, as you ever are," says I.

"That emboldens me to another suggestion," says she. "As we have not been rowing for many hours, it may be that we have drifted again into a current, so do let us rest as patiently as we can doing nothing."

I agreed to this, and we passed an interminable time, as it seemed, as best we might; but, truly, no hours ever spent in that dear soul's company were ever so tedious or weary. For, as I say, we had no means of telling whether we were moving or standing still; but lay there, seeing nothing, hearing no sound, feeling no motion, and in a state of uncertainty and dread of unknown possibilities that was enough to drive one to a frenzy.

And so we lay or drifted (I know not which) for a time that seemed to have no end. Once or twice we made a pretense of being hungered, though, Lord knows, 'twas pain to swallow a morsel for our vast terror; and sometimes we made as if we would go to sleep a while, but could never close our eyes for blinking at the darkness in hope of seeing some sign of light; and from time to time we burned a fire-nut, but without perceiving any change at all in our condition.

But at length, when we were beginning to talk of the advisability of rowing again, for we were as blind to our position as ever, to our unspeakable joy we felt the cane fender of the canoe grinding against the rocks, and before I could get a light to see where we were, my lady cried aloud with joy:

"Look, dear Benet—look up there!"

And casting my eyes round, without knowing whither she pointed, I presently spied a bright star; and the next moment the whole starry firmament was revealed.

Thus did we come out of that wondrous cavern in the night, having gone into it in early morning; but whether we had been therein one day or three we could never make out.

CHAPTER LXIV.

HOW (AMONG OTHER MATTERS), IN SEEKING TO KILL A SNAPPING BOAR, WE FALL UPON AN OLD FRIEND.

No hearts were more joyful than ours at this escape from that cave of eternal night (as my lady called it). To us the little stars were as full of radiance and comfort as the sun of midday, so that we could do naught but feast our eyes for a long while. But we were not unmindful of our debt to Providence for this deliverance, taking it as a special mercy that we had been brought out in the night; for the light of day would have blinded us to a certainty after being plunged so long in impenetrable darkness, as men eating after starvation do drop dead of surfeit.

Being no more inclined to sleep than a thistle in the morn (for this was to us, indeed, rather the break of day than the fall of night), we went gently down with the stream, which was of a reasonable body, winding awhile amongst rocks, but coming at length to an open country, whence we caught sight of the moon resting on the tops of those mountains we had passed under, and more fair than ever we had counted it before.

For many days our minds were haunted (as of a dream) with the recollection of those fearful hours under the mountains, and meeting some friendly Ingas we questioned them about it; but as well as we could make out, they knew it only for a mighty den, whence they supposed the river sprang; but they knew nothing of the issue on the other side, none ever having dared to go beyond a few fathoms of its entrance, because of the prodigious darkness and obscurity therein, etc.

I could write several books of our adventures in descending that river into the Baraquan, and so down the Oronoque, if I had the patience; but I have not. For a man can not be forever a-counting of mile-stones, but must needs (seeing himself near his journey's end) run on amain, taking little heed of things of the wayside. And, in truth, having got again on the broad river, with an easy, free current to bear us onward, and Nature above and around smiling upon us encouragement, we openly deemed that the worst of our troubles were over.

I say we openly deemed this, but secretly I judged that the worst of my troubles was to come. For I could no longer blind myself, as I had in the beginning of our journey, to the fact that in the end we must part. Nay, remembering the terrible shock I had sustained that day in our cavern, when I thought it possible my dear lady might die of fever, I now felt it my duty to contemplate our inevitable separation, in order that when the time came for our farewell I might bear myself with becoming fortitude. So every night, when I lay down, I repeated to myself that awful question, "What should I do without her?" setting myself to devise some manner of life by which I might reconcile myself to the will of Providence. In this way I strove to armor myself against the sure arrow of adversity.

Whether Smidmore were alive or dead, as I sometimes guessed he might be, the result must be the same when my lady came again amongst her friends in England; for there must she resume her condition, and be honored as a lady of position, whilst I must ever be plain Benet Pengilly, and a man of the woods. Thus, knowing I must lose her, I begrudged the movement of the sun, and saw him set each evening with a profound melancholy, knowing another day was past from the few that were to give me happiness.

How I clung to those days, how I strained my senses to catch every word and gesture of my dear lady's, only they can imagine who have been warned by physicians that their dearest friend must surely die ere long. 'Twas, indeed, the feeling that had choked me when I believed my dear lady to be dying, only lessened by the hope that after my last hour of joy was come, long years of happiness might be her portion.

We were many weeks—nay, months—on the river, and, as I say, we had adventures of divers kinds without number: some pleasant, and some distressful; but, on the whole, my dear lady's health and spirits being of the best, our journey was prosperous. But as weeks and weeks passed on, it did seem we should never come to the end of this great river and now we began to grow mighty anxious lest the rains should set in again ere we reached the coast of Guiana, which would enforce us to take refuge from the floods till the season was past. One day we set ourselves to calculate how long we had been a-coming from the cave, and what time we might yet have for our going; and as near as we could reckon, rain might be expected in three weeks. But as to our distance from the coast, we were without means of calculation, the Ingas on this part of the river whom we encountered understanding nothing of what we said, and showing such hostile spirit as made us chary in seeking them for information.

It was our practice of a morning to leave our canoe in the mooring we had found for it the night before, and go a-hunting in the woods for such fruit and game as we required for the day. From one of these expeditions we were making our way back to the canoe with nothing but some fruit, and that none of the best, for we were in an unfavored part, and our eyes on the lookout for any kind of game that might serve our turn, when my lady, being in advance of me, suddenly came to a stand.

"I am convinced," says she in a whisper, as I came quickly to her side, "that I saw something leap behind yonder thicket," pointing to a clump of shrubs about a furlong distant. "Do you go, Benet, to the right, while I make my way to the left, that between us we do not miss our game, for I am greatly mistaken if it be not a tayacutirica."^[7]

To this I agreed, begging my lady to have a care for her safety, for these creatures have tusks like any jack-knife; and so we separated, going about to get a fair shot with our arrows at the beast. Now, to get to the further side of the thicket, I must either cross an open space, or round a growth of high shrubs; and as, for lack of provisions, I feared greatly to startle our quarry before getting aim, I chose the latter. Scarce had I got beyond the thicket when I heard a scream that I knew at once no boar could make, and, fearing my lady had startled some savage Inga or jagoarete and stood in peril, I drew the sword from my belt in a twinkling, and leaping out of the scrub into the open rushed towards the thicket, shouting lustily. But ere I was half across the open I heard a voice cry out therefrom:

"Lord love you, master, do me no mischief. 'Tis but your humble servant, Matthew Pennyfarden." And with this, out from the thicket leaps my faithful friend; but a sight to see, for the rags of clothes that covered his nakedness all fastened together with strings of grass in lack of buttons, and a great bush of hair about his head, so that but for his voice I might not have known him.

Before I could recover of my astonishment he seizes my hand, and cries he: "Quick, master, behind these brambles for a refuge, though I fear never a Portugal in the world now I have you at hand."

"There be no Portugals here, friend Matthew," says I.

"There you are wrong," says he; "for I do assure you I spied one of 'em creeping upon me with a bow, when I sang out in the hope of alarming my mates, and had the good chance to bring you forth. Nay, look you, master; there is the young villain!"

Then I burst into a good, hearty laugh, for the "young villain" to whom he pointed was none but my dear lady, who was now running towards us. Then discerning who it was, on spying more closely, my friend Matthew slaps his leg, and cries he:

"Zookers! 'tis her ladyship, as I might have seen if my eyes had not been dimmed with a fever. I beg your pardon a thousand times, madam, in having mistaken you for a Portugal. 'Tis not the first time I have fled from a female, but 'twould be the last if every one wore the breeches—saving your presence—to such advantage."

"Tell me, good friend," says she, cutting short this pleasantry on her costume, "have you happily found my uncle?"

"Ay, madam," he replies. "That I did by such good fortune as I shall relate to you at our leisure; and, sure, I was no happier to find him than he to be found. I left him hale and hearty at the mouth of the Oronoque, where he guards his two ships against the accursed pirates that practice their villainous calling in those latitudes. His loving messages to your ladyship and to your master I can but ill express at this moment for my own delight in seeing you once more."

And therewith, as if unable to restrain his affection any longer, he threw himself upon my neck, declaring this was the happiest day of his life. "For Lord love you, master," says he, "I thought never to have seen you again; and but for the strategy I have learned of the Portugals, I could not have persuaded my company to persevere in this search for you."

"Where is your company, friend Matthew?" says I.

"Best part of 'em, master, are dead of disease, or eaten up by wild beasts," says he with a rueful shake of his head. "Only eleven of us are left out of twenty-five stout and lusty fellows who left the ships in the beginning of the summer, and they lie about a mile down the river. 'Twas as much as three boats could hold us with our stores and provisions, when we started; but now a single boat would carry us, for our stores are long since gone, and we are all more or less wasted with privations and sickness. Only I have contrived to keep a little flesh on my bones, and that was due to a hope which the rest have long since abandoned."

"Are we still so far from the mouth of this long river?" asks my lady.

"Nay, madam; not so long but we may hope to get down to it in a few weeks," says he. "Though I have kept this from my company, lest they should insist on returning. We began our journey when the river was still swollen with the rains, and we have been for ever a-going up those rivers that discharge themselves into this, whereof there are scores, and all so alike that no man can tell which is the right but at a guess. Hows'mever, no such trouble shall we have now, for the current must bear us to the sea, and I have taken good note of the way."

In this, discourse, and much other for which I have no space, we made our way to the river, and in our canoe speedily dropped down to that part where lay the poor remnant of that good company who had braved so much to find us.

CHAPTER LXV.

WE COME AT LENGTH TO THE MOUTH OF THE ORONOQUE, BUT WITH DISMAL FOREBODINGS.

It was piteous to see how these poor seamen, ragged as any bears, and thin as hurdles, were affected with joy when they learnt that their troubles were as good as ended—weeping and laughing by turns, like very fools. This extravagance of delight was, I say, sad to behold, for sure the sight of strong men who have lost the dignity and composure of manhood, and are brought to the weak condition of little children, is not less deplorable than the aspect of young faces overcast with the care and anxiety of age.

However, this was but the shock of suddenly returning hope, and when the transport was over they became reasonable, and mended apace. The ease of going down that river in comparison with ascending it is incredible, as may be gathered from the fact that in one day we passed two marks set up by these poor fellows at intervals of eight and ten days. At each of such marks they would stop to give a great cheer of delight; then, filled with fresh vigor by these sure signs of rapid progress, they lay themselves with such might to their oars that 'twas as much as my friend Matthew and I in the canoe, with Lady Biddy at the helm, could do to keep up with them.

And here it may not be amiss to tell that my dear lady, before joining this company of men, had taken occasion to change her stripling's dress for the gown we had carried down with us, for now there was no longer necessity for her to penetrate the thick woods, exposing herself to brier and bramble, and she would no more appear in a dress unbecoming to her sex.

We had been descending the river best part of three weeks, when Pennyfarden assured us we were nearing an island whereon, to lighten their boats (in order to make better head against the stream), they had left some of their stores under a tent made of a lug-sail; and soon after this, a joyful shout from the company in that boat that led the way signified that the island was in sight.

"Now," says friend Matthew—"now shall we be all able to dress ourselves decently, and return to Sir Bartlemy like Christians, for amongst the stores is a chest of excellent buff jerkins and sea-boots."

Presently, coming up to this island, where the seamen were already landed, we found them wandering about in great vexation and trouble, for the tent had been torn down, and they could find none of their stores, save an empty barrel and the charred end of their chest, which had been broken up for firewood.

At first we set it down that the Ingas had been there; but Pennyfarden, casting his eyes about that part where the empty barrel lay, shook his head ruefully, and declared that they had no hand in this business.

"Pray how can you tell that?" says I.

"Why, look you, master," says he, stooping down and picking up three or four long iron nails that lay scattered in the herb, "no Inga would have wantonly cast these away, for he prizes them more than all the gold and precious stones by which we set such store. And they have not been overlooked or dropped by accident, for they were bound up in paper, and lay at the bottom of the barrel; and, see, they are scattered broadcast around us—scattered by those who themselves had no need of such things, and were meanly minded that no one else should profit by them—wanton waste and devilry that the worst Inga would not be guilty of. I do sadly fear that this is the work of mad sailors; what say you, Master Palmer?" adds he, addressing an old seaman who had joined us.

"Like enough—like enough," says Palmer dismally; "and if it be as you suppose, then Heaven help us all. For," adds he, after a long-drawn sigh, "none of our ship-mates would thus destroy and waste our stores unless he had mutinied against our captain, and sought to bring grief by our undoing."

The rest of our company, coming up, joined in this opinion, and one cried that there was no hope left us. But my lady, who was ever quick to spy a comforting gleam where none saw aught but dismal clouds, told them they did wrong to despond so readily, "for," says she, "if some of the men have rebelled, 'tis clear they have gained but little by it, or they would not have come hither."

"You are in the right of it, madam," says Palmer. "If they mutinied, 'twas because they would no longer lie at the mouth of the Oronoque, awaiting our return; and had they succeeded in overcoming our good captain, they would at once have set sail and gone hence."

The company, seeing the soundness of this argument, plucked up courage again; but we all agreed that, as the mutineers might be somewhere betwixt us and Sir Bartlemy, we must proceed with caution; and as the nights were fairly light (though no moon), and the river pretty well known to us, we resolved to journey only by night henceforth.

By the end of that week the rains began to fall. However, this gave us but little trouble, for not only did it increase the strength of the current that bore us onwards, but it lessened our danger of falling in with marauders, who would now be forced to seek shelter of some sort. My chief concern was for Lady Biddy; but I contrived to protect her from the pelting storm with a very fair kind of tent set up in the canoe.

We reached that mouth of the Oronoque where the ships lay at nightfall on the third day of the rains, and without molestation; and here, though it was too dark to make out the vessels, we discerned a light about a mile out, as we judged. Thither we considered it advisable to proceed at once, for if we found that the mutineers had overcome my uncle and held the ships, then might we with more likelihood return to land, and escape with our lives under cover of the night.

So now, with as little noise as possible, we drew out into the open, Thomas Palmer, who was an admirable good seaman, leading the way in the biggest of our boats.

We were yet a couple of furlongs from the light when Palmer stayed his rowers, and we coming up with him, he whispered us that one of the ships lay hard by without light aboard; and sure enough, on straining our eyes, we perceived on our right hand a dark mass, which might well be a ship's hulk, but I could make out nothing for the pelting rain and obscurity.

"Well, Palmer," says I, "what is best to do? Shall we examine this closer or go on?"

"Master," says he, "I am for examining this vessel. For if we get an ill reception on the further ship, and alarm is given, our retreat to the shore may be cut off by a sortie from this here."

So, being agreed amongst themselves, we drew on till we reached the ship, and then we found that she lay aground and on her side, as if she had been careened. Twice we pulled right around her, raising our voices to draw attention; but no one stirred abroad, and we remained unchallenged. Not a sound could we hear, nor could we find out much with our eyes for the darkness and rain (as I say); but in passing those ports on the under side of the ship, that lay pretty near on a level with our heads as we stood up in our boats, a most sickening stench assailed our nostrils. Not knowing what to be at, we lay still for a few minutes, listening in silence; then Palmer called out lustily and we beat the side of the ship with our oars. Never a sound did we get in reply, nor could we spy sign of movement or glimmer of light anywhere, which put our superstitious seamen to great fear. But this Thomas Palmer, being bolder than the rest, presently volunteered to go into the ship by one of the ports and get some explanation of this mystery, which he accordingly did, and after being absent some time he comes again to the port, and cries out that we can come aboard if we will, for there is none there to do us mischief.

"What!" cries one of the seamen, "are none of our old mates aboard?"

"That I can not tell for the darkness," says Palmer; "but mates or not, this I will answer for—every man-jack of 'em is dead."

At this moment Pennyfarden, catching me by the arm, calls out:

"Lord love us, master! look above there."

Looking up as he bade us we then perceived (our eyes being now grown accustomed to this obscurity) two bodies hanging over the sea about a fathom from our heads we sat in our boats, on that side of the ship which (as I say) inclined over towards the water. Despite the dimness, we made these out to be the corpses of men, and doubted not that they hung there from the yard-arms above.

For some while we could do nothing but strain our eyes at these indistinct objects as they slowly swung in the little breeze that was springing, being pierced (as it were) with fear that this was my poor old uncle, thus barbarously put to death by the mutineers; but still more terrified with the uncertainty of the whole business, the silence, the darkness, and that foul stench of corruption that poisoned the air.

"Let us get hence!" says one of the seamen hoarsely.

"Nay, we must know if this be our commander that hangs here ere we venture to the ship where there is light," says Palmer. "Have you never a tinder-box, master, or anything dry enough to burn?"

I had my tinder-gun dry in my pocket, and my lady found amongst our store in the canoe two or three of the cuati-nuts, and with some ado we contrived to get these alight under the tent that I have mentioned. And when they were well ablaze we rowed right under the hanging bodies, where, standing up, I suddenly brought the flaming nuts out of the tent and lifted them up as high as I could over my head, so that the light fell on the faces above. Their eyes were staring wide open, and their lower jaws were dropped. But one was an eye short, and I knew him at once for Ned Parsons; while the other, by his pointed teeth alone, I could have sworn to amongst a thousand for our old enemy Rodrigues!

CHAPTER LXVI.

TOUCHING THOSE INCIDENTS THAT HAD HAPPENED TO SIR BARTLEMY AS HE LAY AT THE MOUTH OF THE ORONOQUE.

Turning from this grisly spectacle while still the flame was bright, Thomas Palmer cries of a sudden: "Why, this is none of our ships; for our sides are painted of a lively hue."

Whereupon, casting my eyes that way, I perceived that this was none but that great black ship which had been our undoing.

So now, guessing pretty well how matters stood, we no longer hesitated to draw towards that light we had been making for. And coming to it anon, and calling out loudly for those aboard, we were answered at once by the lusty voice of my stout old uncle, who had been brought on deck by the watch on perceiving our light alongside the black ship.

Hearing his voice, my Lady Biddy cried in her sweet voice, as clear as any bell: "We are here, dear heart; we have come back to you."

To tell of the great, unbounded joy in every heart when we came on deck would call for more wit than I possess, so I must span that over and come to the time when, the day beginning to break, my Lady Biddy was induced to go into the cabin prepared for her; and my uncle and I, grown calm, sat us down together with a bottle and a paper of tobacco, and he fell to telling of his adventures; of which (not to weary the reader) will I repeat no more than is necessary.

"You see, nephew," says my uncle, "when we anchored in these roads, the water was prodigiously swollen by reason of the flux of rains; for you must understand that there is a bar to the east, which does in a manner hem in the flood. Well, here lay we very peacefully a week after the party had set out in search of you, when what should we spy in the offing one early morn but the black ship, which I knew at once for my old enemy, and another, which hath turned out to be none other than our first ship, the *Adventurer*, fitted out as a pirate, and commanded by that villain Parsons. My first intent was to stand up to them and pay off old scores; but having regard to the weakness of our company by the absence of those picked men gone up the Oronoque, and reflecting that if I were by any accident crippled in this bout, it would go hard with you on your coming hither, I was persuaded from my purpose; but as to showing our heels to the enemy, as some advised, that would I not do. They came on, thinking to make light work of such small fry as we were; but we stood to our guns and beat 'em off all day. However, when we could no longer see to fight, I found myself so crippled that I resolved to draw our little barks into shallow water, where their heavy ships might not dance round us on the morrow as they had that day. Accordingly we put our boats and towed us in till we touched bottom. The next day our enemy, spying us in our new ground, lifted anchor and bore down on us, thinking to pepper us all round and about as before; but presently they ran aground at a decent distance from us by reason that they drew so much more than we; nevertheless, they were near enough to bruise us again sorely with their great guns, and that was all they wanted, for 'twas the design of that accursed Rodrigues to waste none of his men in hand-to-hand fight, but just riddle us day after day with his large shot until we sank or yielded. But herein did he reckon without taking account of the hand of Providence, which is ever on the side of right; though it does seem at times as if He would be for ever a-scourging us. That night the waters sank so prodigiously that ere daybreak both we and the pirate careened over in such sort that our guns could no longer be brought to bear one upon another, which was a comfort to us. Out of this pickle was there no way until the waters should again swell. Seeing which, this Rodrigues sent me a mighty civil letter, saying that he had come there but to refresh his company and get water; bearing me no ill-will, but rather the contrary; and since, as it was evident, we must lie there neighbors for months to come, we should do better to make terms of peace and live in comfort than to go plaguing each other out of existence. To this I sent answer that I would by no means make terms with a villain, and that if he would live he must keep out of my reach. A reply came saying that he should certainly have regard to my amiable warning, and that as he was averse to useless bloodshed, he should order his company to keep to the east of our position in their expeditions ashore, and while mine kept to the west no injury would be offered us; therewith he signed himself my 'obedient, humble servant, Rodrigues.' Well, nephew, I perceived it would be to our advantage to agree to this condition—tacitly, for I would never put my hand to compact with such a rascal. And, to be brief," says my uncle, "we passed the summer without conversing or coming to blows with our neighbors. But foreseeing full well that Rodrigues, as soon as the waters rose, and he could float his ships, would certainly give his company the pleasure of spoiling us before going away, I took my measures to be prepared against him, keeping my company cheerful, sober, hopeful, and God-fearing, which Rodrigues could not do by his men, because they were naturally of a violent, willful disposition. So while mine daily increased in steadfastness and vigor, his grew more violent and lawless, as we could hear every night by their drunken revelry and singing of filthy songs. And then, knowing the advantage must be to him who could first get afloat, I did secretly by night convey all my heavy stores out of this ship into my companion bark, keeping aboard only such shot as I intended to deliver into that scurvy pirate. The first day of the rains we lifted; yet I still of purpose kept her careened over to deceive Rodrigues. The second morning, the water having risen in the bay still further, I found we might contrive, with the next breeze, to right the ship and get into that deeper water where the *Black Death* lay; and with this design I got all my men to their posts, and everything ready for a speedy start. In the afternoon came a sweet little breeze from the land, on which I gave the signal; and all replying with a hearty cheer and stout hearts, we presently righted ourselves, and shaking out our sails slid easily off the sand, like a duck into a mill-pond. And now, nephew, I bore right up to Rodrigues with a warlike blast of our trumpets, and passing to that side of her where she lay exposed below the water-line, I poured such a volley through her timbers as would stay her from taking to the water if she had the mind, Then

wore we round by her other side, and gave her just such another dose over her bulwarks and through her decks; but my gunners, at my desire, did take especial care to bruise all her boats, so that they could not put off to our attack. And having served Rodrigues' ship in this sort, we wore away and served his consort—for they were a couple—in the like fashion. In line, Benet, we riddled 'em both like a pair of colanders, and seeing by the disablement of their boats that they could neither do us any further mischief, I held off, knowing they must come to yield themselves up to our mercy in the end from sheer starvation; for they had no store aboard, by reason of their wilful improvidence and headstrong insubordination, and no means to provide themselves with necessaries from the land neither, now that every boat was disabled. We counted that a few days would humble Rodrigues and bring his rascals to their knees; but they were in no mood to suffer privation long, and that very evening one of their number swam to us, while his fellows spread out a white sheet over the side of their ship for a sign of peace. Coming aboard, this messenger said he had been sent by his commanders, Edward Parsons and Sanchey Rodrigues, to acknowledge themselves at my mercy, and to know what terms I would make with them and their company.

"Surrender yourselves prisoners to me," says I, "and you shall receive such treatment at my hands as humanity prescribes, until I may deliver you to the ministers of justice to be dealt with according to your deserts."

"Why, your honor," says he ruefully, "that is but to offer us a safe conduct to the gallows; and for my own part I would as soon trust to Providence in these wilds as to justice in England. 'Tis hard on us poor fellows, who would die honest men, and have no love for such plaguy adventures as those who have brought us to ruin."

"Nay," says I, "if you would have indulgence of me I must have good assurance that you are not willing accomplices of your commanders."

"I take your honor at that," says he quickly, "for though I be here in the name of our commanders, my chief purpose is to plead for my mates. You shall have that assurance you demand before another day is past: set every one of us down for a born scoundrel else."

"And with that he leaps into the sea, and swims back to his ship. In the middle of the night following we were aroused by shots fired on the *Black Death*, whereby we knew that the men had risen in mutiny against their captains; but clearly they were prepared for this assault, for the fighting continued on and off all that night and best part of the day following; but about six in the evening the battle grew to its loudest, and after half an hour we perceived that it 'twas decided one way or the other by the firing coming to an end, and a prodigious cheer being raised. Nor were we long in learning how matters stood, for shortly after the company, coming to the side of their ship with a waving of hats and much hallooing, swung up that wretch Rodrigues and his fellow, Parsons, by their necks to the yard-arm."

When my uncle had made an end of his discourse, I ventured to ask him if he had chanced to hear anything of Sir Harry Smidmore since he had been lying in these parts.

"Nay," says he, "I have seen naught of him; but I got tidings of him only yesterday from one of the pirates we have now aboard. He tells me that before coming hither Rodrigues put ashore on that island where he set you and Smidmore, to see if hardship had subdued your spirits and inclined you to cast in your lot with him. There, on a post planted in the shore, they found a bottle tied, with a letter inside it signed by Sir Harry, telling how—to his great joy and the praise of Heaven—he had been found by an honest merchant putting in for water, and was about to sail with him thence for the city of Bristol. And so, Benet," says he, "you have no reason to torment yourself on that score."

CHAPTER LXVII.

LADY BIDDY BREAKS HER TROTH, AND WE HEAR FALMOUTH BELLS AGAIN.

Our carpenters set to work and patched up the sides of the pirate ships without delay, so that when the water gained still more they floated without leakage.

While this was doing, the rest of the companies were mightily busy making all ready for our departure. And to see the nimble bustle on all sides, and to hear the lively mirth, mingled with snatches of sea-songs, in every part, one would have thought there was not a sad heart aboard; yet, Lord knows, there was one amongst them as heavy and dull as lead. For now I could reckon the number of days (within a few) that it would take us to reach England; and once my Lady Biddy was landed there, and I was assured that Smidmore was alive, I must quit her forever, and go elsewhere to finish the rest of my life as I best could alone. However, I did my utmost to bear a cheerful and contented mien, for killjoy is but a poor friend. I could find nothing to talk upon without restraint; but I went about with a quick step, as though I had all the business in the world to look after, and made a good pretense to sing songs and whistle old tunes—though they nearly choked me, for I could recall none but the ditties my dear lady and I used to sing together in our home in the cave. Nevertheless, despite my whistling, etc., I could see my dear cousin was anxious about me—for women do see through deceit and right into the very heart of a man as we can in no wise; and many a time out of the corner of my eye I perceived her watching of me with grave eyes and a drawn face—nay, once when I broke off whistling because I found I had got on to the tune of "Spring flowers be sweet" (which was our old favorite song), I saw her turn away with her dear eyes full of tears.

To cut this matter short, we set sail ere long, and with a prosperous gale came ere long to the Canaries, where we rested to revictual and better equip ourselves. Here were two or three English ships; and one day Sir Bartlemy, having come from a visit to one of our countrymen, told me that he had learned for a certainty that Sir Harry Smidmore was in England, and that all the world did talk of his escape, etc., etc.

Hearing this, I perceived that now the time was come for making my last sacrifice; for 'twas useless to return to England, and, worse than that, to pain my dear lady with that dejection of spirit which I could not conceal. And so, after a night of such bitter struggling between my baser and better self as I am willing to pass over, I went to my uncle, as he sat alone in his cabin, and told him I had given up my design of returning to England with him, and should count it a favor if he would entrust me with one of the ships to go a-trading as his agent to Campeachy and those regions.

"Why, what maggot has bit you, nephew?" says he in amaze. "You have shown no disposition to go roaming since we quitted the Oronoque; nay, it seemed to me that your sole joy was to be with us, and that you could not rest out of sight of niece Biddy."

That was indeed true, but I felt I must indulge this delight no longer, but break away from that perilous, passionate attachment while I had the manhood to obey the advice of my conscience. But I could not explain this to my uncle, and so hung my head in silence, being as sore at heart as any man could be.

"Do you feel it is your duty, Benet?" says my uncle tenderly, after a pause; seeing, as I take it, how matters stood.

I nodded my head, not daring to speak, lest my strength should give way under the strain of anguish that I felt in thinking I must never again see my dear lady.

"In that case, dear fellow," says the kind-hearted old gentleman, getting up and laying his hand on my neck, "God forbid I should balk your design. You shall have a ship, and means for your venture, to boot, as being but a little out of that great store of gold we have taken from the pirates. May the Lord prosper you in all you undertake, as doubtless he will, being just as well as merciful."

"We will say naught of this to my Lady Biddy, uncle," says I, "for I know not how to explain my sudden turn of intention to her satisfaction."

"As you will, nephew," says he—"as you will."

Then, taking my friend Matthew Pennyfarden aside, I asked him if he would come with me and share my fortunes.

"Lord love you, master," says he, "that will I with all my heart, be it anywhere in the world."

So we secretly fitted out a ship, and got all ready for the venture I had in my mind; and there was nothing left to do but to bid my dear lady farewell, which was the thing I dreaded woefully, yet saw no way of avoiding. However, the night before I designed to set sail, my uncle undertook to break the news to my lady lightly, as if 'twere a sudden whimsey that possessed me.

The next morning as I sat in my cabin, looking at the card which was to guide me to Campeachy, but my eye wandering from that part to the wilderness where the sweetest moments of my existence had been passed, my lady came on board, and ere I knew it stole to my side.

"Is that where you are going, Benet?" says she, leaning over my shoulder.

"Ay," says I, stammering like a fool; "Sir Bartlemy has told you?"

"Yes," says she, "and I've come to know where you mean to bestow your little comrade."

"My little comrade?" says I, choking with despair; "I have none."

"What's become of the little comrade?" asks she.

I could make no reply save by putting my finger on the map where, as I guessed, we had encountered the party sent to meet us, and my little comrade had put off her stripling's dress and donned her gown again.

"Your little comrade," says she, bending over me till her glowing cheek was side by side with mine—"your little comrade has changed her dress, but not her heart, Benet. The little comrade who saw you striving to be a brother, knew you to be a lover, and liked you none the less because you failed. To hide your love was an effort; to hide mine a grief. Now you know why I was dull, Benet. I was sick of love, dear—sick of love."

And with that she laid her cheek to mine, and such rapture seized me that I knew not what I did.

Yet presently a sudden recollection chilled me, and I said with a groan, "Smidmore!"

"Smidmore!" says she, her pretty brows creasing in anger and her lip curling with scorn. "Hast not my uncle told you of his treachery?"

"His treachery!" said I in amaze—"never a word."

"'Tis because he would hide the weakness and shame of a man he had taken for a friend. When he found we were gone from England he gave himself up to the flattery of his friends; and instead of following us to our help, as we followed him, is paying his court to another. But why should I be vexed with him?" says she, her face melting with sweet kindness; "for, sure, no troth should bind us when we cease to love. And, in truth, dear Benet, had he been constant I must have broken my pledge, having no love but for you, dear—no love but for you. Take me, sweetheart," adds she, stretching forth her hands, "or else I die an old maid."

THE END.

[1] Turtle.—F. B.

[2] Ferns.—F. B.

[3] The chesketaw is a venomous fly like the mosquito, but bigger and more poisonous.—B. P.

[4] These acutis are a kind of conies that dress themselves on their hind-quarters and feed with their fore-paws in the manner of a jack-squirrel.—B. P.

[5] A sort of stag, as big as any Devonshire cow.—B. P.

[6] These birds are as like our pheasants as any two peas in a pod.—B. P.

[7] These tayacutiricas are a kind of large snapping boars, very fierce.—B. P.

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